# EXPLORING COMMUNITY PARTNERS' PERCEPTIONS, MOTIVATIONS, AND SHAPING OF SERVICE-LEARNING

by

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# ABSTRACT

This multisite case study sought to build a deeper understanding of community partner experiences with service-learning collaborations. The study examined how community partners involved with service-learning collaborations shape and evaluate these collaborations; what their motivations were when they started participating; why they choose, or choose not to, continue participating; and how service-learning supported their organization's identity.

The study was comprised of 11 community partners, including seven nonprofit organizations, one government agency, and three Kindergarten–12th participants. It also included four staff from the three college service-learning centers represented in the study. Using a qualitative design, data were collected through a document review of community partner websites and annual reports, a focus group with college center staff, and 11 individual interviews with community partner representatives.

Four major themes evolved from this study: expectations, investment, communication, and echelons of collaboration. Community partners and college center staff discussed how expectations, investment, and communication overlapped, yet contained separate characteristics that made each theme valuable in service-learning collaboration success. Community partners conceptualized varying echelons of collaborations that developed through relationships. Finally, community partners explained how service-learning assisted them with meeting operational needs that were

central to their organization's identity.

This study contributes to a growing field of literature about community partner experiences with service-learning. The findings from this study build on policies, practices, and research regarding service-learning and how the four major themes are vital in developing and sustaining collaborations.

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# PREFACE

As a freshman in college, I was given an opportunity to travel to a conference that explored a new way of doing service. This seemed like a great idea at the time; after all, it was a free trip to the capital city and a chance to meet other college students implementing service opportunities across their campuses. So, I hopped in the van and spent the next 2 days discussing service-learning. It seemed a bit odd to me that anyone would want to add learning into a service component since we were already having a difficult time getting college students to commit to showing up to service projects. This is where one of the "adults" pointed out the brilliance behind this pedagogy: students engaged in the service as part of their class so they were motivated by a grade and, in return, also gained exposure to professional settings and applications. The annoyance was despite being excited about service-learning, I never got to see service-learning in action over the next 3 years as I completed my undergraduate degree between two institutions. I did not think much about service-learning during this time, but remained heavily involved in my internship with the American Cancer Society and volunteering with other organizations.

It was not until my master's program that I was reintroduced to service-learning. One experience was outstanding, while the other was a complete waste of my time. I tried to let the unsuccessful experience go because the community partner did, after all, gain an updated database after hours of tedious data entry. In the end, I knew service-

learning could be a waste of time or an excellent experiential opportunity for students, faculty, and community partners. Then came my first opportunity to work with service-learning in a new role as a service-learning teaching assistant. I helped set up the project and syllabus and graded students' reflection journals. At the semester's end, the students produced an amazing policy guide for the organization and highlighted how much they had learned from the experience. Although the students had an enlightening experience, I soon discovered that the community partner never shared the policy guide with coworkers or implemented students' suggestions. When the opportunity arose to participate on the community partner side I dove right in thinking I had all of the answers to create a great experience for all stakeholders. The challenge came when the faculty member never once contacted me, and the students changed their project after I left for maternity leave. All of this occurred after a couple of meetings with the students to discuss what we needed as an organization and how what we needed could be developed into a practical experience related to their class and interests. In the end, the students did gain practical experience, and we as an organization gained research that helped us develop future programming. Since then, I have been in the faculty role in which I have vowed to remain in constant communication with community partners, students, and any other stakeholders. Although this effort is not a guarantee for a successful end, it is a stronger approach to supporting a process that increases the likelihood of a successful conclusion.

Reflecting back on my student, faculty, community partner, and administrative experiences in multiple collaborations, I have learned that above all stakeholders matter. Without them the collaboration cannot reach its full potential. It is because of these past

experiences that I chose this dissertation topic with the goal to revisit the community partner role that I often miss.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Rubin asked, "Why do so many schools, nonprofits and philanthropies fail to have the impact they dreamed of having?" (p. 5). He attributed this failure to build collaborative relationships to the fact that many public leaders never learn the process of developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships. This idea is not that far-fetched considering that partnerships vary across disciplines and sectors and in definition. Jacoby (2003) explained that she elected not to choose a single framework, set of principles, or single theoretical lens to conceptualize partnerships because they vary so much. Janke's (2009) findings on higher education faculty and community partnerships suggested that some partnerships develop a separate organizational identity (i.e., "members' collective perceptions of those features that are central, distinctive and enduring to the organization," p. 79), while others never exceed temporary cooperative relationships. These temporary cooperative relationships do not advance to a shared understanding of "who we are together" (Janke, 2009, p. 76).

One example of a potential collaborative partnership is service-learning, which affords college students the opportunity to connect course content with the actual experience of working with the community and reflecting on this experience (Cress, organizations, kindergarten-through-12$^{th}$ grade (K–12) schools, preschools, and other

2005; Jacoby, 2003). Interaction in service-learning might include students[1] and faculty, as well as community partners. Community partners may include nonprofit community or government-focused organizations. "Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5).

Community partners may agree to collaborate without a full understanding of what service-learning is. Agencies may agree to service-learning opportunities because of a crisis or referral (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002) or because they do not have sufficient staff or funding to handle a possible opportunity. Service-learning also might serve as an opportunity to provide "extra hands to accomplish the organization's regular work" (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p. 13). Providing community partners with more education about the tenets of service-learning, along with the opportunity to provide insight and feedback, could strengthen service-learning collaborations. Community partners may enter collaborations as stakeholders with a better understanding of the benefits, challenges, and expectations associated with service-learning. Tschirhart (1996) noted that stakeholder support "is greatest when stakeholders interpret their interests, values, and norms to be congruent with an organization's purposes, activities, and outcomes" (p. 3). Key considerations are whether or not community partners view service-learning as a partnership, relationship, or project and what they wish to gain from and contribute to these possibilities.

The nonprofit sector is expected to continue its growth. Based on data from 45

[1] For purposes of this study, any reference to students refers to higher education students unless otherwise noted.

states, in 2010 the nonprofit sector had more employees than the construction and transportation industries combined and increased employment by 1% from 2009 to 2010 (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Geller, 2011). Between 2000 and 2010, nonprofit job growth was on average 4% per year in ambulatory health care fields, and also saw growth in arts and recreation (2.7%), education (2.6%), and social assistance (2.2%; Salamon, Sokolowski, & Gellar, 2011). Additionally, K–12 schools face increased pressures related to funding and staffing support as legislatures examine possible budget restrictions. Service-learners may be a viable solution for filling the voids left by restrictions. Some examples of cutbacks may be in after-school programming or art education. Service-learners may assist with after-school programming or teach lectures on famous artists and musicians.

The literature about higher education service-learning partnerships has primarily focused on student learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999) and the value of community-oriented work for faculty in relation to the influence on the tenure process (Enos & Morton, 2003; Jacoby, 2003). If quality service-learning partnerships are to evolve, stakeholders must revisit and redefine their idea of relationships (Toole, 2002) and perceptions of reciprocity. Community partners play a pivotal role in service-learning partnerships, but community partners' confusion over the semantics and expectations for service-learning, as well as higher education's lack of understanding of community partners, could mean fewer sustained and developed service-learning partnerships for students and faculty.

Although the bulk of literature about service-learning has examined challenges for students and faculty, a new wave of research is dedicated to exploring the community partner perspective (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Those involved with service-learning seek

to better understand what successful service-learning projects entail, but this is difficult to do if not all of the stakeholders involved have a voice in the process. A lack of involvement may lead to a lack of agreement on goals and expectations for these collaborations. Although this new wave of research is growing, there is room to build depth and breadth around this topic. This study sought to further develop knowledge around the stakeholder group of community partners in relation to their perceptions of and motivations for service-learning collaborations in order to further the literature and practice around these collaborations.

## Conceptual Framework

### Organizational Identity

Organizational identity offers a conceptual framework to assess whether service-learning is consistent with core commitments of organizations. Community partners may have various missions and visions, but an organizational identity framework allows for exploration into how service-learning falls in line with these missions and visions and helps organizations do what they say they do. "The concept of organizational identity is specified as the central and enduring attributes of an organization that distinguish it from other organizations" (Whetten, 2006, p. 221). Organizational identity pertains to the fundamental, distinctive, and persistent characteristics of an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011). Organizational culture, modes of performance and products, and core values are attributes of organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). "The core point here is that organizations are best known by their deepest commitments—what they repeatedly commit to be, through time and across circumstances" (Whetten, 2006, p. 224). In

nonprofits and K–12 schools, the mission of the organization might collectively represent the commitment as a broad understanding of the organization's central purpose. "Nonprofits and public education exist for clear social missions and not for profit, efficiency, or personal gain" (Rubin, 2002, p. 5). Some mission statements include the organizational role or function, while others might be more ambiguous (Young, 2001). Young explained identity as "a distinct yet holistic notion that integrates, supports, and drives a number of operative concepts guiding the long-term direction and character of an organization" (p. 143). However, despite the importance of character there are challenges surrounding organizational identity.

Arguments over how to achieve and maintain the commitments to what an organization is and how it achieves this can vary, despite the end goal being the same (Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011). "An organization's identity may influence individuals' perceptions of what is most essential to the organization, and, by extension, what is most essential for their own work roles" (Janke, 2009, p. 79). This idea poses an interesting debate for nonprofits and K–12 organizations engaged in service-learning collaborations. If the commitment of a K–12 school is to provide education for its students, and the focus of a nonprofit organization is to support its mission, where do service-learners fall in line with these foci? To answer this question, it must first be asked whether community partners perceive service-learning collaborations as partnerships where identity is achieved through an understanding of who we are together (mission) and reciprocity, or whether service-learning simply provides reciprocity through student service, community partner placement, and a final product. In Janke's (2009) small-scale study, she noted that some community partners believed good relationships existed, but they would not

identify these relationships as partnerships. Community partners further described these as interpersonal relationships rather than as separate groups or partnerships (Janke, 2009). It may be a stretch for researchers to believe that service-learning collaborations are separate organizational identities that achieve a collective commitment. Instead, they often are simply reciprocal relationships. It is difficult to predict how partnerships will develop (Enos & Morton, 2003), given the varying attributes (e.g., stakeholder numbers, length of partnership, previous relationships) involved.

This study advances the literature around collaborations between community partners and higher education institutions, particularly related to whether community partners view these collaborations as contributing to achieving their missions. These missions often fall in line with organizational identity, which includes utilizing resources to support the organization's character (Young, 2001). Service-learners may be resources who contribute to a community partner's goals surrounding mission support and sustainability. The extent to which service-learners contribute to community partners' identity has been researched little because it is still unclear how community partners view these collaborations.

## Research Questions

The goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how community partners characterize service-learning collaborations and to what extent community partners wish to be involved in the development, maintenance, and evaluation of these collaborations.

The following research question drives this qualitative study: *How do service-learning collaborations support the organizational identity of community partners?*

Organizational identity was explored as the conceptual framework for this study in an effort to better understand how service-learning aligns with organizational identity and mission support. Nonprofits were asked to discuss whether support for organizational identity and mission exists and provided examples that showcased this existence. Six guiding questions were also explored in this study with the goal of further developing the literature and supporting the overarching question.

The first guiding question for this study was how do community partners view service-learning collaborations: as partnerships, relationships, projects, or something else? "One can differentiate partnerships from other types of institutional relationships by asking the question, 'Who benefits'?" (Jacoby, 2003). Some of these partnerships may benefit only one stakeholder, such as the community partner receiving the service. Others may see all stakeholders benefitting as community partners receive the service and students increase learning through a practical project. Beere (2009) noted three essential elements of partnerships: mutual relationships, more than two parties involved, and parties sharing a goal or purpose that is mutually accepted. Rubin (2002) echoed Beere's sentiment that collaborators should have a common goal in mind. This common goal could be central to reciprocal collaborations as each stakeholder shares his/her desired outcome for the service-learning project while supporting their fellow stakeholder/s' goals at the same time. Early discussions among service-learning leaders included debate over the accuracy of the word partnership because of the power differential between nearby communities and higher education institutions (Jacoby, 2003). "Although service-learning is fundamentally about relationships, even the use of the terms campus and community creates a dichotomy that suggests isolation" (Enos & Morton, 2003, p.

31). Understanding each stakeholder's voice should advance the discussion around power and conflicting goals. This study examined how community partners identified service-learning collaborations and which characteristics they tied to this identification in hopes of advancing the community partner voice.

Partnerships can be difficult to predict given the many factors that may influence them (Enos & Morton, 2003). These factors range from whether funding is involved, to individual stakeholder motivations for becoming involved to preferred number of stakeholders involved. Additional guiding questions for this study built on the overarching question of how community partners perceive service-learning collaborations and what motivates them to become and remain involved. The second guiding question was how do community partners vary in their development, motivation, opinion, and expectation of service-learning collaborations? The lack of literature around community partners leaves a void in understanding what motivates community partners to enter into collaborations and what they expect to gain from them. Increasing staff capacity, educating service-learners about community work and mission, and/or training possible future workforce members are some possible expectations. Faculty providing training and/or research for community partners in their academic area of expertise or serving on governing boards are other possible motivations. There is also no clear understanding of whether community partners view service-learning differently from each other in the sense that the majority of service-learning projects either involve K–12 schools and/or nonprofit organizations. Much of the literature has lumped all community partners together leaving a dearth of literature that determines whether nonprofits and K–12 schools have different motivations toward and expectations about service-learning.

Kindergarten–12 schools often have stricter policies around who can and cannot volunteer since the clients are children. Restrictions are also often formal in nonprofits where vulnerable populations such as individuals with disabilities or youth are the clients. Stricter policies might include background checks and memoranda of understandings as opposed to informal agreements. More formal arrangements where background checks occur often take longer to establish. Another question is whether there is a difference in motivation and expectations between direct-service entities, such as those in which service-learning involves mentor tutoring, versus those with indirect service, such as redesigning an organization's policy manual. There likely will never be a one-size fits all approach to service-learning, but a better understanding of possible stakeholders should contribute to the growing best practices literature around building sustainable service-learning collaborations. This study included representatives from K–12 schools and nonprofits. The data collected from their responses were separated to determine whether answers vary or are similar between the two groups.

A third guiding question for this study was how do community partners view service-learning collaborations in terms of opportunities such as developing human capital, social networking, and stakeholder involvement? Sandy and Holland (2006) identified sustaining and enhancing organizational capacity as a direct impact on community partners when community partners described the benefits of service-learning. Included in this was the idea that service-learners are a critical part of the workforce and can enhance the workforce by becoming future staff, donors, and volunteers (Bell & Carlson, 2009). It is unclear how often, if ever, community partners track involvement with service-learners after collaborations conclude. Also unclear is the expectation

community partners have for networking through and with faculty for referrals to additional service-learning projects as well as the flip side of how much involvement community partners want to have with classroom elements (i.e., syllabus development, grading student projects, guest speaking). This study asked community partners to consider the extent to which they viewed service-learning collaborations as opportunities to network and become involved and whether they had tracked these opportunities.

This study's fourth guiding question was to what extent does having a service-learning experience/s prior to working in a community-based organization influence community-based staff's willingness to collaborate? Much of the service-learning literature has examined whether service-learning produces more socially active citizens, but little research explores whether professionals who participated in service-learning collaborations as students seek out service-learners or are more willing to work with them than community organization colleagues who did not have this experience. Bell and Carlson (2009) noted that some respondents in their study with Stoecker and Tryon admitted that one motivation for working with service-learning students stemmed from their prior service-learning work, which took place before they were employed in a community-based organization. This study explored whether having a service-learning experience prior to their community-based organization job influenced community partners' decision to collaborate with a service-learning project to explore whether a correlation existed between prior experience and willingness to collaborate.

The fifth guiding question for this study was how are service-learning collaborations structured in terms of stakeholder involvement? Jacoby (2003), among others, describes service-learning collaborations as having a faculty member, student/s,

and a community partner. Although this is the traditional model, other stakeholders may also be involved. Service-learning centers are one example of an additional stakeholder on higher education campuses across the United States; some centers are more involved in the placement of students and assessment of service-learning projects than others. There are several other possible stakeholders, such as those receiving the service (e.g., nonprofit clients and elementary students), administrators, and board members at both the community partner and the higher education institution. It is unclear whom community partners identify as stakeholders in service-learning collaborations. Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison (2010) described moving beyond the traditional model of campus-community partnerships to the "SOFAR" framework, which includes students, organizations, faculty, administrators, and community residents, building on Bringle, Clayton, and Price's (2009) work. The former study examined literature around service-learning collaboration stakeholders and sought to identify whom community partners identified as stakeholders in collaborations.

Finally, the study explored what support systems do community partners have in place for service-learning collaborations? Funding is an important element in K–12 schools and community partnerships, but has not appeared as a commonly investigated characteristic in the service-learning literature. The most common collaborations involve students providing skills and knowledge to the community partner through service, but often there is potential for funding opportunities with private sector partners, corporate and individual grants, public partners through government grants, and nonprofit partners through foundation giving. A National Center for Education Statistics report in 1999 found that 16 % of the public K–12 schools surveyed did receive funding for service

(U.S. Department of Education Brief, 1999). These funding entities encourage applicants and recipients to collaborate with additional partners so the money provided will benefit more than one organization with a common goal (Hopkins, 2011). This could include government and private funders who may highly encourage or require collaborations in funding (Sowa, 2009). Service-learning is a possible avenue for collaborations with multiple stakeholders who in turn serve as beneficiaries. The challenge is increased accountability and reporting if external funding is involved. Community partners and higher education institutions must have benchmarks in place to assess their partnerships, which is difficult to achieve in the limited timeframe for seeking external funding. Without benchmarks, it is difficult to assess the impacts of collaborations (Sowa, 2009) such as service-learning. This study explored how often funding factors into service-learning collaborations and the extent to which it influenced community partners' willingness to collaborate.

Great potential remains for additional research around community partner involvement with service-learning collaborations. For example, it is still unclear whether community partners think of service-learning as a partnership or simply as a short-term collaborative effort. Additionally, what motivates community partners to say yes to these collaborations and the extent to which they benefit in terms of funding and networking and want to be involved in curriculum design and evaluation are unexplored. Furthermore, we need to know what outcomes community partners hope for in their collaborations. This study's goal was to provide answers to these questions.

## Significance of the Research Study

Some researchers argue that service-learning has become institutionalized across higher education campuses ranging from small community colleges to prestigious research universities, as it becomes a common academic class requirement for students at higher education institutions (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). However, there is no general requirement that American universities engage with communities (Moore & Lin, 2009). Butin (2010) argued that today's faculty is not trained to engage with the nonacademic audience about its research, nor to link courses to communities outside of academia. Academic institutions range greatly in their expectations for community engagement and research values, so it is unlikely that a universal requirement for service-learning will ever exist. Despite the community partner's potential to be the most important stakeholder in the service-learning collaboration (Eby, 1998) the focus of most academic published work about service-learning has been on higher education students and institutions. The literature around service-learning continues to grow, as does the demand for more in-depth studies around community partnerships. This study responded to this demand by exploring community partner motivations for becoming involved and staying involved with service-learning partnerships. The focus groups and interviews utilized in the study can assist academic researchers in developing theories around community partner involvement, motivation, and retention and offer an avenue for identifying common themes for best practices for community partners' participation in service-learning collaborations.

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study explored how community partners characterize service-learning collaborations and to what extent community partners wish to be involved in the development, maintenance, and evaluation of these collaborations. The majority of literature around service-learning has centered on student learning and faculty, but a growing body of community partner studies is advancing knowledge around this specific stakeholder group. To help achieve this study's goal of gaining a community partner perspective, literature on service-learning, service-learning and general joint efforts, and organizational identity was examined. Literature around nonprofits was included in these sections because nonprofits comprise the majority of the organizations in the community partner group.

The service-learning frame discussed informal and formal definitions of service-learning as well as past studies around community partners and service-learning and the successes, and challenges of service-learning. This frame set the stage for a deeper exploration into the second frame around joint efforts. The joint efforts frame further explored characteristics and definitions of joint efforts, along with motivations, successes, and challenges involved with the sharing of power and the goal of reciprocity. Finally, the organizational identity frame explored higher education and community partner missions, systems influence on organizations, and collaboration stakeholders.

## Service-Learning Definitions and Characteristics

There likely will never be a concrete formula for quality student learning because each higher education institution has its own unique culture. However, that does not limit researchers from seeking a better understanding of how student learning happens and which pedagogies facilitate it. One pedagogy frequently used on higher education campuses is service-learning. Service-learning has many definitions, some of which change with the inclusion or elimination of a hyphen between the two words service and learning (Sigmon, 1994). For purposes of this study service-learning was considered a form of experiential learning, which includes opportunities for students to address human and community concerns while promoting student learning and development through reflection and reciprocal actions (Jacoby, 1996). Although the terminology of community engaged learning is gaining ground and has been adopted in place of the terminology of service-learning at institutions such as the University of Utah (Bennion Center website, 2014) and Weber State University (2014), community engagement is often viewed more as an overarching phrase that encompasses several forms of experiential or active learning where the community is engaged. Both the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement and Campus Compact outline service-learning as a pedagogy that incorporates curriculum with community engagement. This study focused primarily on service-learning.

In 1990, Boyer called for teachers to stimulate active learning and encourage students to become critical and creative thinkers. Service-learning has been identified as a pedagogy that leads to the achievement of Boyer's vision. As a pedagogy, "service-learning is education that is grounded in experience as a basis for learning and on the

centrality and intentionality of reflection designed to enable learning to occur" (Jacoby, 1996, p. 8). Cress (2005) furthered the definition of service-learning as an opportunity in which "students engage in community service activities with the intentional academic and learning goals and opportunities for reflection that connects to their academic disciplines" (p. 7). Jacoby (1996) noted that service-learning is a way to enhance students' critical thinking skills as they complete service, incorporate academic knowledge, and reflect on the process.

Service-learning is an arguably relatively low-risk avenue through which institutions partner with communities (Jacoby, 1996). Collectively, groups can come together to discuss issues and concerns, and possible solutions to these issues and concerns (Jacoby, 1996). The nature of service-learning projects is that they are a semester-long (Eyler & Giles, 1999), fulfill the requirements of a course, and often touch only the surface of an issue given the time constraints of course length. Although short-term courses are more common, there are examples of service-learning programs that encompass fall and spring semesters (E. Aleman, Jr., personal communication, November 17, 2009). However, the implementation of academic year-long programs is constrained by the nature of faculty course loads, student course selection, and departmental class offerings.

Although there are several definitions and characteristics of service-learning, common characteristics include intertwining academic coursework with practical application and critical reflection (Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Jacoby, 2006). An additional tenet of service-learning is reciprocity, which is considered a key element of quality service-learning (Bringle & Clayton; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Jacoby, 2006).

Reciprocity is sought as community partners, students, and other stakeholders work together with a goal of mutual benefit through practical student placements. Finally, most studies on service-learning consider the stakeholders to be students, faculty, and community partners, although recent literature includes administrators at higher education institutions as well as individuals (e.g., K–12 students, people with disabilities, youth populations) served by community partners (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009).

The collaborative focus of service-learning places students in settings with individuals who may not be familiar to them. Students may work with community partners outside of their academic discipline, socioeconomic status, and race and/or religion. These opportunities expose students to settings and individuals they may not otherwise experience in college. One challenge of service-learning is preparing students for these contexts (Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, & Shinnamon, 1998) and discussing the type of service students will perform. Some of these service placements may include direct service, where students work directly with clients of the community partners, such as after-school tutoring at elementary schools or youth mentoring through youth-focused nonprofits. Direct service falls in line with program-oriented service-learning, where students fill positions in already established programs (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Students may also work indirectly with community partners through project-based work such as marketing brochure design, policy and procedure research, and/or program creation. Project-based service-learning continues to gain in popularity, as it is a way to manage the short-term length of service-learning courses (Bell & Carlson, 2009). Organizations with project-oriented needs lean toward specific requests that are one-time projects rather than on-going (Blouin & Perry, 2009). A lack of familiarity with these settings and

clients can pose problems for the community partners, such as additional time needed to educate students about their mission and/or cultural trainings centered on the clients they serve. The mission is important to organizations because it is the reason why the organization exists (Zietlow, Hankin, & Seidner, 2007).

In Blouin and Perry's (2009) study of community organizations, participants sometimes perceived service-learning students to be less invested in the mission and the organization than volunteers. This perception could result from the lack of clarity around community partner requirements for orientation since it is unclear whether community partners require the same amount of orientation time with service-learning students as they would with interns, clinical practicum placements, or traditional volunteers. Also unclear is whether community partners spend more time training, monitoring, and evaluating service-learners depending on whether the service is direct or indirect. Finally, there is a mixture of staff and volunteers supervising service-learners, ranging from the volunteer coordinator to whichever staff member is available (Gonzalez & Golden, 2009).

Although each community partner likely has its own individual guidelines for service-learners, general questions around orientations, trainings, and mission education demonstrate a gap in literature around community partners (Giles & Eyler, 1998) and how they value service-learning partnerships (Sandy & Holland, 2006). The majority of research has examined the supply side (e.g., higher education students) over the demand side (e.g., nonprofits; Gazley & Littlepage, 2009) of the service-learning equation. This presents problems as campus administrators and faculty make assumptions about community partners needing service-learners (Gazley & Littlepage, 2009) rather than

valuing what the community partners might add to these collaborations through the knowledge of the populations they serve and current issues tied to their organizational missions. This links back to the lack of literature around understanding community partner perceptions and motivations for participating in service-learning joint efforts.

## Community Partner Research

The community partner may be the most important stakeholder in service-learning collaborations because they provide the context in which the applications occur (Eby, 1998), yet we know the least about this group. Part of this gap has to do with the research focus on student learning outcomes and the effect of service-learning on faculty tenure. Additionally, in attempts to institutionalize service-learning and gain support, campuses must emphasize how programs such as service-learning are central to the mission rather than marginally growing out of the mission (Rubin, 1996). Balancing a higher education organization's own mission seems like work enough, let alone also balancing community partner missions while seeking the best fit for service-learning collaborations.

Research has provided ideas for assessing campus-community partnerships (Holland, 2001; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000), the terms of engagement for campus-community partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002), examples of school-community partnerships (Harkavy, 1998), and how to bridge university-community partnerships (Hunter, Munro, Dunn, & Olsen, 2009), but not all studies about university-community partnerships consider service-learning or the viewpoints of all stakeholders involved.

An exploration of how community partners view students, faculty, and service learning (Vernon & Ward, 1999) and an evaluation of student performance by

community partner staff (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000) were some of the first studies to seek community partner insight into service-learning collaborations. Vernon and Ward surveyed 65 community service agency directors in four towns in a rural northwestern state where a college or university was located that had an established relationship with the campus community service/service-learning/volunteer office. They followed up their surveys with interviews of 30 personnel from the agencies in one community. The community organizations found the students to be effective in helping them meet their goals and overall were satisfied with the students. However, these organizations also noted challenges with commitment level variation from students as well as the timeframe of the project being too short. Ferrari and Worrall surveyed 30 community-based organization supervisors who had participated with a "medium-sized, midwestern, private, urban university" (p. 36) in a service-learning collaboration during a 10-week quarter in 1999. They combined these surveys with the community organization supervisors' 109 completed student performance evaluations and found overall satisfaction with the students' performance, including their attitude, reliability, and work quality.

In 2006, Sandy and Holland examined community partner perspectives through focus groups with 99 seasoned community partners who had collaborated through service-learning with at least one of the eight California campuses explored in the study. Sandy and Holland's study yielded results that concluded community partners do value their role in students' learning experiences. This study was groundbreaking because it included a large sample of community partners and asked these community partners directly about their perceptions and motivations around service-learning. Community

partners expressed a desire to provide quality partnerships with higher education service-learners even if the timeframe was short and many expressed a deeper desire to become more involved with curriculum and the faculty member. Many additional studies around community partners have transferred information from Sandy and Holland's findings to develop additional questions.

That same year as Sandy and Holland, Basinger and Bartholomew (2006) surveyed community partners to develop a better understanding of nonprofit organizations' motivations for involvement with service-learning collaborations, as well as their expectations for and satisfaction with these joint efforts. Basinger and Bartholomew found that the community partner staff had both self-interest in obtaining valuable work from service-learners and emotional connections to service-learners and their learning.

Stoecker and Tryon (2009) published a study in which they conducted multiple interviews with 67 community partner staff to further develop an understanding of motivation, expectations, and outcomes with service-learning collaborations from the community partner's standpoint. Stoecker and Tryon, and their fellow researchers, identified several themes from their interviews. One thematic area was community partner motivation, which was broken into four areas including altruism to educate students, long-term commitment to help produce more community oriented graduates, increased human capacity, and deeper relationships with higher education campuses (Bell & Carlson, 2009). Additional themes included a need for more consistent communication among students, community partners, and faculty and a deeper commitment to valuing diversity and community partner mission (Stoecker & Tryon,

2009). These themes are transferable to future research, and the community partner interviews showed there is no one-size-fits-all as many of these conclusions were not over- or underwhelming in terms of respondent answers.

While the goals for and results from these studies (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999) were not identical, several themes overlapped, including community partners have a mostly positive perspective of service-learning; community partners typically enjoy working with students; there is no one-size-fits-all approach to service-learning; and there is always room for improvement with collaborations, especially related to communication. Additionally, community partners still have some confusion over the differences between service-learners, volunteers, and interns in regard to their requirements and expectations. One of the community partners who participated in the interviews said, "I do think that service learning programs differ from volunteering in that volunteering is more task oriented. Service learning programs seem to be more a collaboration between the students and the organization" (Bell & Carlson, 2009, p. 22). This is significant because faculty is the mainstay through these projects, likely teaching service-learning courses semester after semester. Students provide the service set up by the faculty allowing them exposure to work settings and careers in community partner organizations, but students change classes at the end of the semester.

Fisher (1996) argued that service-learning provides students with an opportunity to explore career fields and weigh the pros and cons of the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. She furthered this argument by explaining that service-learning is key to promoting jobs in the nonprofit sector where students are likely to do their service-

learning. Finally, Fisher argued that service-learning opportunities might lead to experiences students could include in their resume, as well as opportunities for community partner staff to provide letters of recommendation for service-learners.

Although much of the research has been positive about service-learning, this research is not free from criticism. Some theorists questioned whether student learning does exist in service-learning collaborations (Eyler & Giles, 1999), while others questioned whether community partner input is sought and implemented (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Some argued that the community context is often utilized as a laboratory, including poorer communities for academic gain (Eby, 1998), rather than as a site for mutually beneficial collaborations. There is also debate about what constitutes quality service-learning. This debate is based on how much input students should have in developing projects given the time constraints of the typical semester, whether community partners should be involved in curriculum design that juxtaposes the project and in the evaluation of the project, and how much input and power is valued and sought by various stakeholders.

## Joint Efforts

Stakeholders come together to collaborate. It is in these joint collaborations that stakeholders work to establish goals while balancing power struggles. A clearer understanding of how these joint efforts evolve and support organizational identity could offer guidelines for future collaborations as reflection occurs about the resolution of power struggles and the establishment of mutual goals.

## Cooperation Coordination and Collaboration

Joint efforts have been called many things, ranging from alliances to partnerships, commissions to collaborations, and everything in between. The majority of service-learning literature has defined service-learning as a collaboration, relationship, or partnership, with some questioning whether the semantics really matter, while others believe semantics are important (Bringle, Clayton & Price, 2009; Sigmon, 1994). Winer and Ray (1994) developed a handbook to assist in understanding collaboration. In this handbook, they described characteristics of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration during joint efforts. These characteristics include levels of involvement and risk by stakeholders involved in joint efforts.

Winer and Ray (1994) discussed two crucial elements of successful joint efforts: "everyone must agree on the level of intensity and the level of intensity must be appropriate to the desired results" (p. 23). Level of intensity is the phrase Winer and Ray chose to describe what encompasses the risk involved for parties, time needed to work on the joint effort, and opportunities this effort might bring. Cooperation is less formal and often involves relations without clearly defined missions (Winer & Ray, 1994). Stakeholders often share information about the specific task at hand, but retain authority over their own resources, so little risk is involved because power is separated (Winer & Ray, 1994). This links back to Jacoby's (1996) description of service-learning as having little risk; however, few service-learning scholars refer to service-learning as cooperation because most are hopeful for reciprocal, genuine joint efforts.

Coordination includes more formal and longer-term interactions with an understanding of missions and people moving toward a common goal (Winer & Ray,

1994). Coordination has increased risk because resources and rewards are shared (Winer & Ray, 1994). Power may become an issue because authority still rests with individual organizations, but more sharing occurs (Winer & Ray, 1994). Coordination is not a term often referenced in the service-learning literature, although it possesses characteristics of many joint efforts in which higher education maintains the need for student academic learning outside of the institution, and community partners gain outcomes from students they oversee.

Collaboration suggests shared resources, defined relationships that are closer in nature, and the pursuit of shared purposes and a common mission (Winer & Ray, 1994). "A collaboration is the act of two or more people working together in order to achieve something" (Hopkins, 2011, p. 10). The risks are greater with collaboration because each partner contributes its resources and reputation (Winer & Ray, 1994). Partners in collaboration jointly share resources and rewards, but power struggles may still exist (Winer & Ray, 1994). Carnwell and Carson (2009) argued that although partnerships and collaboration are often used interchangeably, they are different. They conceptualized collaboration as a verb that acts out the noun partnership, essentially noting what we do to achieve something. In this instance it could be argued that service-learning is a form of collaboration to achieve a partnership.

## Partnerships

Authors also define partnerships in varying ways. According to Hopkins (2011), "a partnership is a relationship. It can be two or more people in organizations involved in the same activity; two or more people or groups working together for some purpose" (p. 10). Hopkins considered partnerships and collaborations interchangeable terms.

Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison (2010) countered Hopkins' idea that partnerships and collaborations are interchangeable, arguing that the term partnership is thrown around too casually and too often.

Some authors focus more on the characteristics of, rather than the terms around, partnerships and collaborations. Strand et al. (2003) defined partnerships as including some of the following elements: agreed-upon goals and strategies, trust and mutual respect, shared power, flexibility, satisfaction of each others' interests or needs, and adoption of long-range social change. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Beere (2009) noted that most definitions of partnerships have the following three elements in common: mutuality; two or more individuals, groups, or organizations; and an agreed-on goal or purpose. Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009) stated that partnerships form when relationships include closeness, equity, and integrity. Furthermore, partnerships can include a single or multiple goals, be formal or informal, be short-term or long lasting, or small or large (Beere, 2009). Hopkins (2011) argued that collaborations and partnerships are synonymous and that partnerships often develop out of necessity when resources are slim. This ties to service-learning when students become a form of capacity-building through indirect or direct service for the community partner.

Hopkins (2011) also noted that many partnerships are short in lifespan, and this makes it difficult to produce conclusions for sustainable partnerships. This is reflected in service-learning where many collaborations last only one semester. Another interesting thing about partnerships is that it is not always possible to choose the partners involved (Hopkins, 2011), nor estimate the level of commitment partners will give to the partnerships. This is often true in service-learning as there is no guarantee that students

will register for service-learning courses, nor whether they will be familiar with community partners prior to beginning the collaboration. It is unclear in the literature how often students are familiar with community partner organizations before engaging in service-learning and whether students choose familiar organizations over those they are unfamiliar with when collaborating. Some students may also select organizations based on the organization's mission or populations served. An example of this would be students selecting to work with the American Cancer Society after observing a family member with cancer receive assistance from the American Cancer Society. The literature has not exhaustively examined whether selecting an organization based on a mission closely tied to their personal experiences influences the students' commitment to the service-learning collaboration.

## Community Partners and Joint Efforts

Familiarity with mission and organizational goals of stakeholders does not guarantee a quicker development process in joint efforts. This process could involve several initial meetings, common goal discussions, and time to develop a plan outline. Another consideration is that some partnerships are voluntary, while others are mandated through funding. Gazley (2008) reported that the research around mandated partnerships led to a need to consider them separate from voluntary partnerships. Service-learning partnerships have tenets of both mandated and voluntary collaborations. Students may be required to take a course that requires service-learning for their major or a citizenship requirement (Cress, 2005) and are mandated to participate in order to earn a letter grade. Sometimes students have freedom and input in the design of the service-learning project or program they will help with, as well as freedom to choose whether or not to take a

course that requires service-learning to fulfill their major requirements. Cress (2005) pointed out that requiring students to provide service is viewed by some as defeating the purpose of voluntary service.

Although there is dispute over the semantics around joint efforts such as service-learning, most researchers agree that quality joint efforts are reciprocal in nature. Service-learning is not unique to this idea as its founders and higher education supporters have pressed for reciprocal relationships between the university and community partner organization (Jacoby, 1996). Eckerle Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, Mackeigan and Farrar (2011) noted that community service-learning initiatives are effective when educational institutions and community organizations seek out mutually beneficial outcomes. Reciprocity is evident when all parties teach, learn, give, and receive (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010; Jones, 2003). "As a program, a philosophy, and a pedagogy, service-learning must be grounded in a network, or web, of authentic, democratic, reciprocal partnerships" (Jacoby, 2003, p. 6).

Given the variety of community partner characteristics (e.g., mission, size, clients) and the still growing field of research focused on community partner perspectives, how community partners define reciprocity and how they wish to benefit from these collaborations is unclear. Collaborative efforts can occur whether goals are shared or different (Bingham, O'Leary, & Carlson, 2008). Sowa (2009) argued that there might be multiple reasons for collaborating, including the need for additional resources and a desire to develop new ideas or bring in expertise. Rubin (2002) presented the idea that collaboration and competition go hand-in-hand as we "build teams, partnerships, and cooperatives to get someplace faster, do something better, or make something cheaper"

(p. 10). Leveraging resources and extending capacity while at the same time educating students are multiple reasons for collaboration on the part of community partners. Strand et al. (2003) discussed how students can assist with program development and evaluation through community-based research.

Support for human resources has long been a problem for nonprofits. Salamon (2003) identified some of these issues as struggle to recruit employees when other sectors are more competitive with salary, retention of employees when burn-out is commonplace, and lack of opportunity for advancement as many nonprofits are flat organizations. Another concern is the balance between those who have been in the sector for extended periods of time, who display passion and concern for the organization, and those who have advanced professional skills, but may lack passion (Salamon, 2003). Service-learners could provide balance for these staff as some students have new ideas (Blouin & Perry, 2009) and skills for completing projects (Bell & Carlson, 2009), while other students are interested in the mission of the organization. Additionally, students could be considered consultants of sorts who bring new ideas to the organization. As Fullan (2001) noted, listening to those who disagree or challenge is where organizations and individuals learn and improve.

It has long been a common stereotype that nonprofit and K–12 staff are overworked and underpaid (O'Neill, 2002). Service-learning has the potential to provide an opportunity for staff to look at their work from a different perspective, rather than simply trying to survive each day with the amount of work they must accomplish and little time to reflect and assess their efforts. On the other hand, service-learning may simply be a means to an end to get volunteers in or a free product as staff do not have

time to oversee or train volunteers, but welcome finished products or free volunteers.

Sowa (2009) noted that it is difficult to develop a dominant theory for why organizations collaborate. Looking at motivations of organizations and individuals when it comes to collaborating could further develop a better understanding of common reasons for collaboration.

> Similarly, a finer distinction needs to be made in examining the motivation of organizations to engage in collaborations, one focused both on what benefit the organizations anticipate receiving from an interagency collaboration for their services and what benefits the organizations anticipate to receive overall, benefits tied to their organizational needs and goals. (Sowa, 2009, p. 1009)

Examining motivation could also provide more insight into power struggles that may inhibit the ability to reach shared goals and mutual reciprocity.

Strand et al. (2003) argued that sharing power could lead to more productive collaboration. Sharing power in service-learning means academics do not monopolize power, and community partners do not view students as free labor (Strand et al., 2003). Community partners should be viewed as assets in community-university collaborations, who need the opportunity to be involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the learning that occurs in these collaborations (Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, & Shinnamon, 1998). Many community residents view academia with suspicion; one way to change this perception is to move away from the traditional outreach paradigm of doing service on and for and move toward a doing-with model (Jacoby, 2003).

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) suggested five ways for higher education to move away from the doing-for to the doing-with model. The first is to connect students and communities through commonalities. This idea focuses on placing students in service opportunities that are similar to the students' backgrounds. An example is a college

student whose mother died from cancer when the student was young volunteering at a nonprofit that counsels children who have recently lost parents to cancer. The second method is to blur boundaries. This complements Jacoby's (1996) idea of moving away from a one-sided outreach approach and blurs distinctions between campus and community. Faculty coteaching with community partner staff or holding class at the community partner site are boundary-blurring activities that create more fluidity (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Third, the history, position, and power of all stakeholders in the service-learning collaborations are considered. Not all service-learning opportunities can place students in situations where commonalities occur, so it is imperative to examine positionality in these relationships. Faculty should dedicate time for students to explore their position in society (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Faculty could also enhance empathy towards the clientele served through the community partner with more education around the clientele before sending students out to work with them (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). The fourth area is encouraging reciprocal assessment. This provides community partners who receive direct effects from collaborations with a voice in a collaborative evaluation. Community partner evaluations can be shared with students and then discussed to further enhance reciprocity. Finally, the value of faculty members' efforts around service-learning must be clear in terms of reward and support for the higher education institution's mission. "Service-learning is a way to translate service missions to their initial and local intent, and a way to create partnerships to meet local needs" (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000, p. 776). Both higher education and community partner representatives must consider their own and each other's missions when collaborating. Sandy and Holland (2006) concluded their study with the following

hope for future insight into service-learning: "in the 'end,' higher education and community partners may find that they have each become more committed to the mission, values, and goals of the other" (p. 40).

Nonprofits are accountable to their mission (Young, 2001), so it could be argued that clearer definitions around service-learning, internships, and volunteering would benefit community partners by providing clarity around working with students to fulfill their mission while also meeting student needs. However, it is unclear how often community partners tie service-learning collaborations to the organization's mission. Community partners may be more interested in providing learning opportunities for students than benefits to their own organization, possibly not realizing how to achieve both. Johnson and Chope (2007) noted that service-learning opportunities provide students with a chance to gain exposure to social justice issues at a personal level rather than an abstract level in the classroom, allowing them to examine privilege when working with underserved populations. For example, Johnson and Chope suggested that students conducting a survey around homeless populations might realize that counting people who are homeless is more complex than anticipated.

While it is clear that service-learning cannot occur without community partners as sites where students practice what they learn in direct and indirect forms, "communities cannot be viewed as pockets of needs, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise" (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999, p. 9). Students and faculty should not view themselves as the privileged serving the underprivileged (Henry, 2005). However, despite attention to reciprocity and shared benefits, the focus around service-learning has largely remained on college student transformation (Clark & Young, 2005).

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) argued that "mutual service relationships need to blur these distinctions" (p. 775) when discussing the us and them model that exits between campus and community.

A final question related to collaboration is how often reflection by all stakeholders takes place. If reflection is not part of the process, is evaluation of direct and indirect service conducted, or does any form of review exist at all? One faculty member mentioned a need to "share the variety of ways we have grown as faculty through the partnership" (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010, p. 14). This reflection could further stakeholder commitments to collaborations as relationships expand. "The quality of these relationships is not only important for the work in which the partners are currently engaged, but also because it may represent the capacity of the individuals to engage in future work together, without needing to initiate new relationships with others" (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010, p. 14).

Another factor with relationships is the impact evaluations have on them. If a student fails to complete a service-learning project, the community partner will likely have a poor experience with the collaboration. If the student does a fantastic job and provides the community partner with a useable product, then the experience will most likely be positive. Gonzales and Golden (2009) discussed the challenge of evaluating service-learning collaborations for community partners when faculty do not establish clear expectations and guidelines. For example, Gonzales and Golden suggested that rather than evaluating student work, it would be better to evaluate the students' impact on the community itself and how this ties to the community partner's mission. This approach would show value in community impact rather than just student learning, which

ties back to reciprocity. Stoecker and Tryon (2009) suggested allowing the community organization to contribute to the methods of evaluation and to clearly determine the organization's role in evaluation with the faculty member. This allows the community partner to communicate with the faculty member how the indirect or direct service aligns with their mission.

## Community Partner Characteristics

Most service-learning collaborations involve community partners comprised of nonprofits and/or K–12 schools, although government agencies and other organizations collaborate as well. Community partners vary in terms of size, mission, budget, staff capacity, and professional staff skills among other characteristics. Noted earlier in this paper, community partners play one of the most important roles in service-learning collaborations (Eby, 1998). This leads to the need for more insight into community partners, their motivations, and how they shape service-learning collaborations.

An emergent theme in Sandy and Holland's (2006) work is that there are differences among community partners in terms of organizational structure. Some organizations are formal, while others are informal. Formality can tie to requiring volunteer orientations, conducting background checks, and/or holding quarterly meetings to check in with volunteers. Some organizations see service-learners as requiring too much time to train given the short-term timeline of their service and instead devote formality to volunteers (Martin, SeBlonka, & Tryon, 2009). There also may not be any paid staff with the organization, which impacts time available for formalizing service-learning experiences. This formal/informal debate ties to the composition of professional staff versus professional and personal backgrounds of board members, who are largely

volunteers.

Board members represent the top hierarchy of nonprofit organizations and are ultimately responsible for ensuring that nonprofits fulfill their missions and follow laws and policies. Green and Griesinger (1996) found that nonprofit organizational effectiveness was tied to emphasis on board development, including training of new board members, clarity of board member responsibilities, and evaluation of board members. Basinger, Yack, and Crossland (unpublished) found that community partners felt students' and faculty's unfamiliarity with boards and the governance structure of nonprofits was a major barrier to service-learning collaborations. Governance structures influence the decisions of organizations and staff and their ability to collaborate on joint efforts because boards ensure that missions are met (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001). Some boards may value student service-learners, while others view them as detractors from staff/volunteer time.

Another issue is a lack of clarity around nonprofits and K–12 schools. Many faculty and students are unclear what distinguishes a nonprofit, or why nonprofits exist and sustain existence. This unfamiliarity leaves voids in understanding the nonprofits' role in supporting government programs and the void they fill by providing services where the for-profit private sector has engendered consumer distrust (Anheier, 2005; Moulton & Eckerd, 2011; Young, 2001a; Young, 2001b). Clarity around nonprofit roles provides legitimacy to the nonprofit sector because faculty and students gain an understanding of how this third sector complements private industry and public government. Role clarity also influences the understanding of students and faculty related to resource dependency (ranging from funding to volunteers including service-

learners) and its effect on nonprofit existence (Moulton & Eckerd, 2011), as well as the influence of public policy and market forces on the sector (Young, 2001a; Young, 2001b). These programs and services vary in nature, as does the nonprofit sector, which includes an array of goals (Ahmed, 2013). Along with providing services, nonprofits provide outlets (to a limited extent under federal tax law) for advocacy opportunities (Moulton & Eckerd, 2011) that include education around health issues, domestic violence, and environmental concerns. Nonprofits are recognized as advocacy organizations that bring causes and people together (Ahmed, 2013).

K–12 schools have also changed since many faculty and students attended them due in part to federal regulations around No Child Left Behind and state policies focused on common core standardized testing. A lack of understanding of these policy influences by students and faculty places a heavy burden on community partners to not only educate service-learners about the collaboration itself, but about the organizational structure, mission, and capacity barriers (Bell & Carlson, 2009). Examples of these policy changes include formal and stringent structures in K–12 schools, such as background checks, restrictions on the number of hours in which service-learners can participate, and memoranda of understanding. These also present issues when service-learning is short-term, because background checks and training take time (Martin, SeBlonka, & Tryon, 2009).

Some nonprofits, particularly those dealing with direct service, require additional training, while other organizations require no training (Gonzales & Golden, 2009). Additional training may be required if students work with vulnerable populations, such as victims at a rape crisis center (Gonzales & Golden, 2009). This training ensures that

volunteer liability issues are considered and controlled under risk management assessment (Ahmed, 2013). Training also prepares students to work in contexts unfamiliar to them and emphasizes the importance of reciprocity between students and the community rather than relationships in which students view themselves as saviors of the community (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Stakeholder connectedness is a main element of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999), but should include all stakeholders. Most service-learning research has aggregated community partners, but examining common characteristics of community partners through subcategories such as mission and focus populations could also help with development and sustainability because there are clear differences across community partners.

Differences in budget, mission, and staff size may contribute to the type of service-learning model utilized. Byrd and McIntyre (2011) pointed out that university-school partnerships typically only include students and faculty, while Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison (2010) explored additional stakeholders in their SOFAR model including students, organizations, faculty, administrators, and residents. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) also discussed additional stakeholders in their exploration of social network development through the multiple dyadic relationships in service-learning collaborations including "campus staff, faculty, students, staff from community-based organizations, clients of community-based organizations, and residents of various communities" (p. 513). These stakeholders come from nonprofits, K–12, government, and/or the private sector. An example of this is a new project funded by the League of Cities to improve communities. In Utah, this funding is set for Capital Education, which is a joint effort among University Neighborhood Partners (higher education), Salt Lake

City School District (K–12), and the Salt Lake City Mayor's Office (municipal government) to focus on stronger education and community after-school programs.

The mission and size variations of community partners open a variety of partnering opportunities for higher education given the large number of majors and student backgrounds on campuses. They also contribute to a need to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach for more sustainable collaborations in service-learning. For example, although it is clear that community partners want more involvement from faculty (Mondloch, 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Tryon, Hilgendorf, & Scott, 2009), it is unclear whether they would prefer to work with additional stakeholders such as administrators, service-learning centers, or additional community partners. Additional partners could bring more resources and funding to collaborations, but more partners may also lead to increased coordination and power struggles.

Finally, little is known about community partners' perspectives around how service-learning collaborations end. Very few community partners who have stopped collaborating have been asked to explain why they terminated their collaborations. Without assessment, these conclusions could range from simply not having additional projects for service-learners to work on to dissatisfaction with past service-learning collaborations. Another issue is the large amount of time spent supervising service-learners (Gonzales & Golden, 2009) and whether community partners believe there is a return on investment for this time. Tying back to stakeholder connectedness, additional understanding is needed to explore why service-learning collaborations end. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) noted that some service-learning relationships end with mutual agreement, while others end because the project concluded. It is unclear whether

community partners continue to say yes to service-learning collaborations even when they do not have any service-learning needs. For example, Basinger, Yack, and Crossland (unpublished) found in their study that community partners ranked supporting student learning as an important benefit of involvement in service-learning collaborations. Community partners also ranked mission and strategic plan support as important reasons for collaborating, but it is unclear whether mission support is sacrificed to ensure student learning. This matters because nonprofits are legally bound by their missions (Young, 2001) and should work to support their missions since they exemplify the organization's core commitments. Further understanding from community partners about how they incorporate service-learners into their strategic plans should also support their organizational identity (La Piana, 2008).

## Organizational Identity

Organizational identity is a conceptual framework that may help assess whether service-learning is consistent with the core commitments of community partner organizations. Organizational identity is what is central, distinctive, and enduring in regards to an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006; Young, 2001). Organizational identity could be described in the mission statement for the organization and provides a guideline for values or beliefs related to the organization's purpose (Zietlow, Hankin, & Seidner, 2007). Further, organizational identity is developed around the premise that its core features "are presumed to be resistant to ephemeral or faddish attempts at alteration because of their ties to the organization's history" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000, p. 64). In relation to this study, further research is needed to explore the value community partners place on service-learning collaborations that assist with

meeting the core commitments of the organization or whether service-learning simply provides a labor force that fulfills capacity needs and generates ideas for problem solving.

Janke's (2009) findings on higher education faculty and community partnerships suggested that some partnerships reach a level where they develop a separate organizational identify, in which members have "collective perceptions of those features that are central, distinctive and enduring to the organization" (p. 79), while others never exceed temporary cooperative relationships. These temporary cooperative relationships do not advance to a shared understanding of "who we are together" (Janke, 2009, p. 76). A stronger understanding of how community partners view collaborations can help advance knowledge of whether service-learning falls in line with community partner identity, whether these collaborations reach their own separate identity, and how that might influence larger organizational identity.

It is unclear how often community partners share their organizational identity with students and faculty or who should initiate service-learning collaborations; there are examples of the faculty member, student, or community partner taking the lead (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Garcia, Nehrling, Marin & SeBlonka, 2009). Ferrari and Worrall (2000) argued that in well-designed community-based service-learning courses, all parties are integrated into the education process. Also unclear is how often students and faculty are asked about their perceptions of community partners and these central attributes before, during and after community projects. In recent research, Basinger, Yack, and Crossland (unpublished) found that community partners sought additional feedback from students and faculty to help them improve service-learning partnerships at the community partner level. This request for feedback assisted community partners in

reaffirming their identity based on how others perceived them and placed them within their marketplace or area of service (La Piana, 2008). This is important because past typecasts identified community partners as labs where students did charity work that reinforced stereotypes of communities and schools rather than classroom connections to the professional services community partners were providing (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

Nonprofits have been and are currently tackling their traditionality with the challenge of viewing volunteering from a new light in the form of service-learning. The nonprofit sector is often referred to as the voluntary sector, and nonprofits have long focused on their own organizational needs rather than the needs of volunteers (Wolf, 1999); however, to retain volunteers nonprofits must focus on volunteers' needs as well (Wolf, 1999). This mindset shift is evident when higher education instructors ask nonprofit organizations to invest in students through the creation of quality partnerships with reciprocal efforts, focused on the needs of both the nonprofit and the student learner (Jacoby, 1996). All stakeholders involved in service-learning relationships must revisit and redefine their idea of relationships (Toole, 2002) and their perceptions of reciprocity if a sustainable culture that supports the identity of service-learning collaborations is to develop. Several theorists have argued that reciprocity means mutual benefit for all stakeholders (Jacoby, 1996; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999), but in recent research Basinger, Yack, and Crossland (unpublished) identified that some community partners viewed reciprocity differently from what was defined in the literature. Community partners believed that reciprocity also meant the opportunity to teach students rather than just receive indirect or direct services. This

viewpoint of reciprocity could vary across community partners considering the diversity of missions, clients served, and services provided by the community partners. It could also vary because many of the stakeholders involved with community partners may have different definitions of reciprocity and how service-learning aligns with organizational identity.

Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) explained the importance of reaffirming a clear understanding of what an organization thinks it does and how it sees itself in comparison to how others see it. When these two visions match, identity is reaffirmed (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000), and the mission can be supported through activities even if it means change. This clarity could assist community partners as they continue to face outside influences that may affect their mission and/or delivery of services. "The concept of organizational identity enables us to examine how the nonprofit organization sometimes struggles to restructure or 'reinvent' itself to survive and prosper in a changing environment" (Young, 2001, p. 142). Gioia, Schultz, and Corley supported this vision, describing organizational identity as "adaptive in facilitating organizational change in response to environmental demands" (p. 63).

## Systems Influence

Organizations face both external and internal behaviors that influence organizational identity. Therefore, it is imperative to determine organizational boundaries and which behaviors sit within these boundaries and outside of the organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Open systems theory explores how external energy travels through an organization, the activities that occur while this energy is in the organization, and the output the organization produces from this cyclic process (Katz &

Kahn, 1966). Community partners are organizations that are dependent on inputs (e.g., funding, clients, policies) outside of their internal boundaries, but these inputs are not constant, and therefore it is important for organizations to develop protective devices to maintain stability (Katz & Kahn, 1966). "It is the basic characteristic of every organic system that it maintains itself in a state of perpetual change of its components" (von Bertalanffy, 1950, p. 7).

Although legitimate community organizations do all that they can to fulfill their missions, their stability is still affected by outside influences. Reeb and Folger (2013) developed an illustration that highlights internal and external influences from various system models. These factors range from neighborhoods to services provided to government influence. March of Dimes is an example of an organization that changed its identity due to external influences after it lost its sustaining element when a cure for polio was developed (Young, 2001). Schools have also adapted with the implementation of student learning outcome policies such as No Child Left Behind. These scenarios and other factors may leave organizations struggling to find a single identity among multiple identities after taking on additional duties, or not shedding past identities as outside forces influence internal purpose (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Young argued that it is key for stakeholders involved with an organization to buy into the organization's identity and realize a collective notion, which requires that those involved with the organization know what it is and what it does. Young noted that a lack of clarity around identity often leaves organizations struggling to support operational statements such as missions and visions during strategic planning. Although it is important to establish a single identity based on the core elements of the organization, it is unrealistic to assume that the core

cannot shift (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000) or that flexibility should not exist (Young, 2001c). Katz and Kahn (1966) argued that there is not always agreement about an organization's mission among leaders and members, but that it is more important to understand an open system of inputs and outputs that influence an organization's ability to achieve its functions. "Because identity is not a 'thing' but, rather a concept constructed and reconstructed by organization members, it is theoretically important to avoid its reification" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, p. 76).

Organizations can examine how their current systems are influenced by inputs and outputs to determine where energy has a negative influence (Katz & Kahn, 1966) and may affect the core commitments. This could establish a more stable system as opposed to a quick fad or bandage. A consideration with service-learning is the constant frustration community partners have mentioned in past studies related to student training needs, scheduling conflicts, lack of communication among stakeholders, and the short-term nature of service-learning collaborations (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999). Also noteworthy is whether community partners view higher education collaborators as trying to address these frustrations, or whether community partners are willing to overlook these frustrations because service-learners fulfill other organizational needs (e.g., capacity, volunteer hours, projects) of the organization. Reeb and Folger expressed the need to identify and address these challenges to preserve the sustainability of campus-community collaborations.

Exploring how community partners describe and characterize service-learning collaborations allows researchers to identify the value community partners place on service-learners as they explore how service-learners fall in line with community partner

mission and vision. A lack of communication and evaluation from and to community partners poses challenges for developing sustainable collaborations (Reeb & Folger, 2013). A simple feedback loop would link curriculum development and practical needs. Feedback loops provide organizations with a way to examine the external inputs and what comes from these inputs as they develop into outputs (Skyttner, 2001). For example service-learning affords an opportunity for academic programs to reflect on their identity by receiving feedback about curriculum that is practiced in practical community partner settings (Wertheimer, Beck, Brooks, & Wolk, 2004) and evaluate whether the curriculum ties to the practical world while supporting higher education's identity. "Inputs are also informative in character and furnish signals to the structure about the environment and its own functioning in relation to the environment (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 193). Negative feedback or reflection allows a system to correct itself and focus on a specific subsystem or mechanism to get the system back, or keep it on track (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

Rethinking the value of community partners in the collaboration process is important for higher education stakeholders as well. Service-learning provides students with a setting in which they may collaborate with other students on the same project and do work with a community partner and possibly clients of the community partner. Students and faculty gain an increased understanding of the value community partners have in a service-learning collaboration and in the community, but do not always gain exposure to the core commitments of the community partner, or its identity.

Dating back to Boyer's (1990) call to reconsider scholarship, higher education has been continuously criticized for not collaborating more with the community. Many institutions, individual academic departments, and faculty have responded to this

criticism by developing relationships with nonprofits, community members, businesses, and government agencies (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002) through forms of experiential learning. "However, in general institutions are not structured to support collaborative approaches to learning, research, and organizational functioning" and have not tackled the bigger issue of reorganizing traditional views of learning (Kezar, 2006, p. 805). Along these lines, Eckerle Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, Mackeigan and Farrar (2011) argued that a critical gap exists in the literature addressing higher education's readiness for community-university partnerships. They furthered this by acknowledging, "further attention needs to be paid to the conceptualization and operationalization of university readiness: what structures or features must exist in an organization prior to collaboration to allow that group to be an effective member of a collaborative partnership" (p. 16). Butin (2010) argued that faculty members do not receive training on how to share their research and experiences with the community, which can lead to a disconnect when academic research that could influence best practices in communities is not shared with those communities. Also, faculty members are not often trained to collaborate or understand interdisciplinary programs (Gronski & Pigg, 2000), which supports this disconnect.

Littlepage and Gazley (2003) supported the notion that theory and practice are not connected:

> From a public policy perspective, even while policy makers call for increased investment in student civic engagement, substantial theoretical and practical questions remain unanswered about the impact of community-based experiential learning on community agencies and about the capacity of these agencies to involve students effectively. (pp. 422–423)

Higher education institutions with strong roots in curriculum could connect this

curriculum to practice through service-learning. Community partners could advance their practices by connecting them to theory and the research faculty is conducting. Service-learning connections could further support adaptation to change by both entities in a manner that supports organizational identity rather than forces a movement away from it (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000).

## Stakeholders and Legitimacy

Higher education has long been criticized for responding slowly to external influences (Birnbaum, 2000), which could be attributed to a hierarchy that includes many decision makers (Gulick, 1937), including deans, provosts, presidents, and boards of trustees. Nonprofits and K–12 schools also operate under the hierarchy of many decision makers. This hierarchical structure is important because governing boards maintain and develop policies and likely oversee fiduciary and legal issues that support the organization's mission. Young (2001) discussed the important role of boards as decision makers in response to internal and external conditions that pressure organizations.

"Given that stakeholders often cannot know if nonprofits are faithful to their mission or use funds wisely, they judge the organization by seeing who is on its board of trustees" (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001, p. 51). Boards are responsible for ensuring that nonprofits work to fulfill their mission (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001); however, little is known about how often service-learning collaborations are mentioned or discussed with board members, whether board members are aware that such collaborations exist, or whether they view these collaborations as support systems for achieving organizational identity. The same could be asked about K–12 school district offices' and school boards' knowledge of service-learning collaborations.

"An organization is legitimate if it represents the interests or identities of different constituencies in the community" (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001, p. 52). Communities vary geographically as well as by interest (e.g., environmental advocacy, health education, youth programming) and populations served. Legitimacy is obtained as organizations work to support community characteristics through their missions by providing programming and services that match their purpose (Meyer, 1984). One way to support organizational missions is to create boards that represent constituencies. However, it is well known that women and members of underrepresented communities are the minority on most nonprofit boards (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001). This poses problems for creating a representative voice and variety of opinions in terms of achieving organizational success. Service-learning is an additional way to support organizational missions because students may represent local constituencies in terms of their interests (major in college), personal backgrounds (racial, ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic), and passions (advocacy). They also provide a variety of skillsets and education that may help community partners address issues, raise funds, and educate others about the organizational mission (Ahmed, 2013). Organizational legitimacy supports organizational identity as organizations meet their mission through legitimate practices governed by the board (Ahmed, 2013) and administrators (Sergiovanni, 1994). Without core practices, community partners face the challenge of not portraying that they know what they are doing (Sergiovanni, 1994) and what their purpose is.

To help understand an organization's identity, researchers should identify all stakeholders so patterns of behavior can be observed and historical experiences can be discussed. Organizations likely possess multiple stakeholders at both the internal and

external levels. Any actor who has a stake in an organization's performance or the power to influence that performance should be identified as a stakeholder (Tschirhart, 1996). Often, leaders take for granted the influence stakeholders have on an organizational environment and the decision-making that influences the organization (Tschirhart, 1996). Leaders should recognize that organizations are political and identify which stakeholders influence decision-making **(**Pfeffer, 1981) and culture. Tschirhart introduced an example of stakeholder mapping. The map reflects stakeholders for nonprofit organizations, including internal and external stakeholders. It is unknown whether most community partners consider service-learners as stakeholders. It is also unclear whether service-learners who are considered stakeholders are labeled as internal or external stakeholders. Research shows that community partners still vary greatly in their levels of understanding of different academic and hourly requirements, as well as characteristics of volunteers, service-learners, and interns (Bell & Carlson, 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2006). There is still little research about whether organizations report the work service-learners do as separate from that of volunteers and where these organizations place service-learners on their stakeholder maps.

Another angle is whether service-learners are considered consultants due to the short time they are involved with an organization. Boleman and Deal (2003) concluded that organizations include coalitions comprised of diverse individuals and interest groups. These coalitions might be formed based on the type of work the individual does within an organization, on interest in gaining resources (Cyert & March, 1959), or making change. Service-learners may also be considered coalition members based on these definitions rather than stakeholders who influence organizational decision-making, or service-

learners may just complete their jobs and then leave.

Stakeholders who are not interested in the norms and values of an organization should be encouraged or required to leave (Tschirhart, 1996). Tschirhart's theory could be particularly true in mission-based organizations because service-learners might not be committed to individual missions of organizations given the short amount of time they are with the organization. This lack of commitment may not be detrimental to community partners if service-learners are not considered more than capacity fillers or external inputs (Katz & Kahn, 1966). However, if community partners consider service-learners as crucial to fulfilling core components of the organization, then a clearer understanding of mission commitment in service-learning collaborations would be beneficial. It is likely that service-learners will not have time to truly understand all of the core commitments an organization has within and outside of its boundaries, but a clearer understanding of how to educate all stakeholders involved in a service-learning collaboration could create better lines for support rather than roadblocks.

## Conclusion

Community partners face many challenges, including obtaining funding, supporting professional staff salaries and advancement, overseeing volunteer projects, and achieving programs that provide the best services for clients. A better understanding of community partner identity, community partner boundaries and external and internal influences, and the value community partners place on service-learning will improve practice around sustainable service-learning collaborations. It is unclear whether community partners perceive service-learning as a low-risk cooperation developed as a means to an end for supplying volunteers to meet mentoring demands (direct service)

and/or final product production (indirect service), whether it is perceived as a full blown partnership that achieves its own identity and fulfills mutual gain on all sides or whether it falls in the middle with multiple characteristics of different joint efforts. This study's goal was to add to this knowledge by exploring community partner perceptions around these issues.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN

## Qualitative Approach

The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of *how community partners characterize service-learning collaborations* and *to what extent community partners wish to be involved in the development, maintenance, and evaluation of these collaborations.* This study examined experiences with and the shaping and evaluation of service-learning collaborations from the standpoints of community partners as well as service-learning center directors/staff from three higher education institutions.[2] The deeper explanations are developed through the analysis and interpretation of data collected from a focus group with the college center directors/staff, interviews with community partner representatives identified by these directors, and documents from these community partners' organization websites.

## Qualitative Research

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that qualitative research is appropriate when trying to "uncover the nature of a person's experiences with a phenomenon" (p. 19). Marshall and Rossman (2006) furthered this argument by noting that context matters because settings can significantly influence human action. This study sought to further

[2] For purposes of this study, higher education service-learning centers will be referred to as college centers.

develop an understanding of why community partners participated in service-learning and what their knowledge of service-learning was, along with their motivation for participating in, experiences with, and evaluation of these collaborations. Service-learning collaborations entail the involvement of multiple parties from multiple settings. These multiple parties likely include faculty, students, and community partners. This study used a qualitative design because the interest was in examining the experiences (Stake, 2006) of community partners with service-learning collaborations and the relationships developed while creating, conducting, and sustaining these collaborations.

The purpose of qualitative research is to explore, explain, describe (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009), or emancipate (Yin, 2009). Explanatory research seeks to examine patterns related to phenomena and relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and typically looks at the "how" and/or "why" of phenomena (Yin, 2009). This study's purpose was to better understand why community partners chose to participate with service-learning and how they viewed these collaborations. Qualitative methods provided for in-depth explanation of these questions.

## Case Study

The case study as a method or research strategy (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln; 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009) is used "to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). This method provides researchers with an opportunity to study a phenomenon in-depth and in its natural or real-life setting (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Understanding the context of a case is important because qualitative results are typically not generalized since contexts vary (Creswell, 2007), but they may be transferable based

on the specific context or bounded system (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Developing and maintaining a service-learning collaboration is not a one-size fits all approach, but is likely conducive to particular contexts and parties. At the same time, examples of best practices or similarities between these best practices and sustainability were identified in the qualitative data collected throughout this study.

Creswell (2007) considered case study an example of qualitative research in which the investigator explores a bounded system[3] or case. A single-case study is useful for looking in-depth at service-learning partnerships at one specific institution, but a multicase study affords the opportunity to examine service-learning collaborations in more than one context (Stake, 2006) to determine whether common themes exist at multiple sites. "A multicase study is organized around at least one research question" (Stake, 2006, p. 9) and allows for investigation of cases within a bounded system, (Creswell, 2007), which may be clear-cut or not (Yin, 2009). Researchers identify and analyze themes within each case and across the multiple cases (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Community partners vary in terms of mission, staff and budget size, and clients. To support this variation this study sought participants from a variety of community partners in terms of mission, size, and stakeholders within a criteria-based sample identified by the college centers.

## Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the research participant and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005) and with how we know what we think we know. Qualitative researchers spend time with their participants in the field in hopes of growing

[3] A bounded system includes activities, which for this study is service-learning.

closer to their participants, to better understand the context participants discuss (Creswell, 2007), and to understand participants' experiences and realities. Researchers using a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm use a transactional and subjective stance (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005) in which findings should be co-created through transactions to help describe the "lived experience" (Ponterotto, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and how the knower and knowee interact (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In constructivism-interpretivism,

> In contrast to the objectivity that characterizes the postpositivist paradigm, researchers' values are assumed to influence the research process, although the researcher is expected to examine and understand how his or her values, personal beliefs, and characteristics have influenced the coconstruction of meaning. (Haverkamp & Young, 2007, p. 268)

The constructivist paradigm embraces the role of the researcher as a co-constructor (Morrow, 2005), with an assumption that deeper insights will be reached by both the participant and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). Value is placed on the researcher's knowledge and the knowledge of the participant, as well as how each came to have that knowledge.

I applied a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm for this study, as I have a rich history of experiences with service-learning. Participants often asked me during the interviews about my own experiences with and observations of service-learning. Under this paradigm, the participants valued my experiences, and together we were able to converse and reflect on each other's experiences. The co-construction model allowed us to reach a deeper level of conversation because together we valued what was being discussed, as well as each other's opinions.

## Researcher as Instrument

"Qualitative researchers acknowledge that the very nature of the data we gather and the analytic processes in which we engage are grounded in subjectivity" (Morrow, 2005, p. 254).

A researcher is "conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to the qualitative research study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 243). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm values a harmonious relationship in which the researcher is considered "co-constructor of meaning, as integral to the interpretation of the data, and as unapologetically political in purpose" (Morrow, p. 254). Simply put, "interpretation invites the examination, the 'pondering' of data in terms of what people make of it" (Wolcott, 2001, p. 33), meaning the sense-making activities between the participant and researcher are valued (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Although subjectivity is largely evident in qualitative studies, researchers are able to preserve fairness to the participants' voice by embedding specific tactics within the research design and by utilizing reflexivity where the researcher is able to understand how his or her own experiences influence the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Morrow, 2005).

My involvement with service-learning has extended over 17 years with roles as a student, instructor, advisor, and community partner. I acknowledged an existence of personal beliefs, experiences, and biases toward the subject. I have seen sustainable service-learning collaborations, as well as failed service-learning collaborations from the viewpoint of the roles mentioned above and have developed my own assumptions about what elements and cultures are necessary for service-learning collaborations to be sustainable. Moving from a community partner role back to an academic setting, I was

aware of my bias toward the value I placed on the knowledge community partners had about the focus (e.g., youth services, environmental education) of their organizations. I acknowledged the interaction between my review of the literature and tacit theories (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and used these to develop some of the questions for the focus group and interviews. These personal experiences and assumptions, along with a desire to learn how community partners view service-learning, led me to select this research topic.

## Self-Reflective Journal and Peer Researcher

Morrow (2005) stressed keeping "a self-reflective journal from the inception to conclusion of the investigation" (p. 254) to record experiences, assumptions, and biases throughout the study (Morrow, 2005). I kept a journal and worked with a peer researcher throughout the research process. Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Morrow considered peer research groups valuable for questioning the researcher's analysis and biases. My peer researcher worked in a nonprofit for 2 years, a college service-learning center for 8 and a half years, and is currently applying to doctoral programs to further her education. During her time in the college center, she oversaw her university's service-learning efforts. This multicase study included different higher education sites, and it was assumed that different meanings existed among participants about various topics discussed in the interviews and during the focus group. My job as a researcher was to clarify these meanings to better understand the realities of the participants and preserve their voice (Morrow, 2005).

## Participant Selection and Study Context

### Case Study Site Context

Criterion sampling is one form of purposeful sampling, in which the researcher seeks out information-rich cases to obtain in-depth information that helps them learn more about the specific research topic (Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposeful sampling used in the case study method allows researchers to focus on specific cases (Yin, 2009), which in this study meet certain criteria. I originally intended to involve community partners who had interacted with one of four institutions: Salt Lake Community College, the University of Utah, Utah Valley University, and Weber State University. However, it was determined based on unanswered correspondence and an absence from the focus group that Utah Valley University would not participate in the study. I moved forward with three sites: Salt Lake Community College, the University of Utah, and Weber State University.

Service-learning occurs on campuses across the United States and is not limited to a specific type of campus. To gain more insight into service-learning partnerships the sites selected for this multicase design had similar and differing characteristics. A common characteristic of each site was a formal college center. For purposes of this study, I defined a formal college center as a designated center on campus, which received institutional support such as funding for staff and programming to conduct experiential learning activities such as service-learning. Each of these sites also had a center director. The three sites differed in terms of mission: the University of Utah is a Research University (very high research), while Weber State is a teaching institution, and Salt Lake Community College is a community college. The University of Utah and Weber State

University were both classified as Carnegie Engaged Campuses, which requires certain levels of community engagement. Salt Lake Community College received the Carnegie classification as this study was winding down. Finally, the three centers varied in terms of staff size and budget. The three center directors were asked to participate in a focus group or to identify staff members they believed were better qualified to discuss community partners and service-learning. It was important to provide background information about these institutions because there was a chance that each site's sample would provide different explanations and opinions about service-learning and because each site was represented in the focus group. I wanted to account for the different institutions each community partner participant worked with in case the results differed significantly from site to site.

Salt Lake Community College

"Salt Lake Community College is Utah's largest college with the most diverse student body. It serves more than 60,000 students on 10 campuses and with online classes" (SLCC website, 2015). Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) is a public community college with open access. "Its mission is to provide quality higher education and lifelong learning to people of diverse cultures, abilities, and ages, and to serve the needs of community and government agencies, business, industry and other employers" (SLCC website, 2015). Salt Lake Community College houses the Thayne Center for Service and Learning. The Thayne Center recorded 250 service-learning courses in 2012–13, which included 5,570 participating students (Thayne Center website, 2015). The Thayne Center has seven employees and boasts a mission "To establish capacity-building relationships with community organizations, facilitate service-learning

development opportunities for faculty, and coordinate service leadership programs for students who are out to change the world" (Thayne Center website, 2015). Salt Lake Community College received the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2015.

University of Utah

> Founded in 1850, it [the University of Utah] serves over 31,000 students from across the U.S. and the world. With over 72 major subjects at the undergraduate level and more than 90 major fields of study at the graduate level, including law and medicine, the university prepares students to live and compete in the global workplace. (University of Utah website, 2015)

The University of Utah houses the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center, which has the following mission: "The Bennion Center fosters lifelong service and civic participation by engaging the University with the greater community in action, change, and learning" (Bennion Center website, 2015). According to its website, the Bennion Center employs 11 staff and offers service-learning scholars programs as well as a service-learning course designation (Bennion Center website, 2015). The University of Utah received the Carnegie Classification in 2010.

Weber State University

> Weber State University provides associate, baccalaureate and master degree programs in liberal arts, sciences, technical and professional fields. Encouraging freedom of expression and valuing diversity, the university provides excellent educational experiences for students through extensive personal contact among faculty, staff and students in and out of the classroom. Through academic programs, research, artistic expression, public service and community-based learning, the university serves as an educational, cultural and economic leader for the region. (Weber State University website, 2014)

Weber State University houses the Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL), which has 15 staff (CCEL website, 2014). In 2007, the CCEL (formerly the

Community Involvement Center) was established at Weber State as a partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs (CCEL website, 2014). The mission of the CCEL is "to engage students, faculty and staff members in service, democratic engagement, and community research to promote civic participation, build community capacity, and enhance the educational process." Weber State earned the Carnegie Foundation community engagement classification in 2008 and had this classification renewed in 2015.

## Participant Selection Criteria

To develop my participant sample for interviews, I first asked the three college centers for a list of community partner representatives who met the following criteria: participated in long-term collaboration over multiple semesters with one or more classes or faculty (seasoned), participated in one to four collaborations (growing), and no longer participating, but did participate at least once (opted out). Because one of the originally identified higher education institutions did not participate, I decided to identify an additional community partner from each of the three sites. This community partner was from a K–12 grade-focused organization. Adding the K–12 partner allowed me to maintain the goal of 12 total interviews.

The college center staff had varying experiences identifying community partners who fit in the opted out category. One college center staff member was able to immediately identify two nonprofits that had opted out. One of these nonprofits did not respond to interview requests, while the other declined to interview but did email some thoughts about service-learning. The center staff member was not able to identify additional community partners who fit the opted out category. The second college center

staff member identified a nonprofit partner who had opted out, but the specific staff member identified had left the organization. There was another staff member who was able to complete the interview, having been at the organization during the service-learning collaborations and since the organization had opted out. The third college center staff member struggled to identify a community partner who had opted out. This was not due to a lack of trying, but rather because there was not a clear reporting channel in place between faculty, the college center and the community partner to report opting out. After further exploration, the center staff member was able to identify a community partner who had opted out. The opted out criteria category proved most difficult for identifying community partners.

"Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). The phenomenon in this case was service-learning. If the participants had not experienced service-learning, it would be difficult to gain an overall understanding of how community partners perceive service-learning. Therefore, it was determined that a staff member would also need to fit the seasoned criteria as the community partner may have been seasoned, but may no longer have a staff member with service-learning experience working for them. The participants in this study contributed to the knowledge base around this research topic (Creswell, 2007) and were able to "provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 141), which to date has had little contribution from the community partner viewpoint. The center directors and staff were aware that the findings from their focus group would be used to develop questions for the interviews around community partner motivations,

perceptions, and evaluation of service-learning collaborations.

Another tenet of qualitative research is that the findings are not always typical and experiences may vary (Polkinghorne, 2005). As expected, community partner participants had varying experiences with service-learning collaborations in regards to success and nonsuccess. A challenge of studying these collaborations was timeliness. As with most things, the longer a person waited before reflecting on the service-learning collaborations, the more likely they were to forget aspects of their experience. It was important to try and find available participants soon after one of their collaborations concluded. This was somewhat limiting with the opted out pool because this group was no longer participating in collaborations, and some had not participated for an extended time period. The participants in the other pools, however, had recently engaged in a service-learning collaboration.

Participants involved in this study were asked to provide in-depth insight into their own experiences and interpretations of service-learning collaborations. I was able to achieve a set of diverse cases and multiple perspectives about this topic (Creswell, 2007) because the cases and participants differed. I originally sought to include 12 community partner participants from the original four sites. After the fourth site was dropped from the multicase design, I decided to identify an additional community partner for each of the three sites that represented a K–12 community partner. The goal was to keep the number at 12 participants with four from each site. This figure provided participant data for individual site and multisite uses. It was also important that the community partner sample pool was based on the staff member rather than the agency because while the agency may be a seasoned partner, it may not currently have staff who

fit the criteria needed to discuss the collaborations. The focus group participants also provided in-depth insight. The college center staff have worked with and observed many service-learning collaborations throughout a variety of classes, majors, and departments on their campus. They provided additional information around service-learning collaborations and the various stakeholders involved in service-learning collaborations.

Staffing became an issue during the participant invitation phase. Four staff contacts identified by the three institutions were no longer working at the community partner agency involved in the service-learning collaboration. One staff member who participated in the interviews is no longer working for the community partner, and one of the focus group participants is no longer working for the college center. Although the findings from this study provide an overview of themes around service-learning collaborations, the college center and community partner agency have new staff members in place who were not invested in this study and may choose not to incorporate the themes.

The information from across the cases and within the cases was compared to the themes from the focus group with the center directors/staff. The community partner participants comprised a useful and available sample because they fit the criteria of having experienced service-learning collaborations with one of the three institutions. The community partners were not limited to executive directors, volunteer managers, or any other staff pool because the main goal was to speak with a staff member who had first-hand experiences with service-learning and could speak about the experiences. This collective data provided themes for each individual case and the multisite cases and will contribute to the growing literature around community partners.

## Data Collection

"A research design situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 25). In the case study approach, using multiple data collection methods can allow a researcher to gain deeper insight into the cases (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009). Yin identified six sources of evidence for case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts. In this multicase study, I collected documentation from community partners' websites and physical sites, carried out a focus group with institutional community-engagement center directors/staff, and conducted 11 interviews with community partners. These forms of data gathering allowed me to examine community partner perceptions of service-learning through various methods to establish triangulation (Yin, 2009). I gathered a large amount of data and ensured control of each site's data by creating separate folders for each site on my computer. It was important that I maintained the integrity of the data for each specific site because I analyzed the data for each individual as well as across the cases.

### Document Review

Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicated that "knowledge of the history and context surrounding a specific setting comes, in part, from reviewing documents" (p. 107). I reviewed mission statements from each community partner's website and also reviewed their websites and scanned their physical sites to see if they had posted any information about service-learning collaborations or other collaborations with students

from higher education institutions. The documents mentioned above were analyzed to help me develop questions for the interviews focused on how community partners recognize the work service-learners do for their organization.

## Focus Group

"There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 1990, p. 184); rather sample size is determined by using useful, credible, and available participants (Patton, 1990). Researchers do not agree on the specific ideal size for focus groups; however, they do consider participant characteristics (contrasting opinions, geographic location, homogeneity) when constructing focus groups (Knodel, 1993). A focus group was held with college center directors or designated staff from each of their higher education campuses mentioned above. I held this focus group at a Campus Compact meeting to generate a collective conversation (Morgan & Krueger, 1993) about their experiences with service-learning. In Sandy and Holland's (2006) study, the researchers found focus groups provided a setting for discussion around a common topic. Focus group discussions might include a wider variety of information (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) than a single-participant interview. The focus group method also provided a way to gather collective data from focus group members in a timely manner (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). I sought to obtain information that explained college center director and staffs' perceptions of community partners' motivations for collaborating, as well as the level of involvement they perceived community partners wanted in service-learning collaborations. Along with guiding questions, I allowed time for follow up questions and conversation. My peer researcher reviewed all questions ahead of time to ensure clarity and bias avoidance.

I used two digital audio recorders to ensure the focus group discussion was recorded. Each participant was given notice that I would record the discussion in the participant request letter I sent requesting their participation in the study. The questions for the focus group were developed from the literature and document reviews, as well as questions center directors and staff and faculty had generated at two prior service-learning events. Utah Campus Compact sponsored the first event and cosponsored the second event with the Bennion Center from the University of Utah. At these two events, center directors and staff and faculty minimally discussed their perceptions of community partners. This study's focus group sought a deeper understanding of the questions and perceptions center directors and staff had around community partner motivations.

Below are the questions from the focus group:

- Why do you think community partners are motivated to participate in service-learning collaborations?
- What are some of the characteristics you observe in successful and nonsuccessful service-learning collaborations?
- How does your center assist community partners with service-learning collaborations?
- Do you spend a lot of time educating community partners about service-learning prior to them doing service-learning collaborations?
- To what extent do you think community partners want to be involved in the shaping of service-learning curriculum?
- What are ways you've seen these service-learning collaborations extend beyond service-learning?

- What are some examples of evaluation or reflection you have seen or have asked community partners to be involved with?
    - What are some of the ways you share feedback from students and faculty to the community partners?
    - What are some ways you share feedback from community partners to students and/or faculty?

Four higher education college center staff participated in the focus group. One staff member was from the University of Utah, the other from Weber State University, and the final two from Salt Lake Community College. All four staff were designated by the executive directors of these institutions to participate because they work regularly with community partners, faculty, and students on service-learning collaborations.

## Interviews

In case study design, interviews provide another form of data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Marshall and Rossman suggested that "the primary strategy is to capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words" (p. 93) when discussing the purpose of interviews. A semistructured format was used for interviews, which allowed me to ask guiding questions and generate nonstructured discussion among participants. Creswell (2007) suggested using an interview protocol, finding a quiet location free of distractions and thinking through recording procedures. Community partner participants were asked to identify a location of their preference with the request that the location be quiet if possible. The anticipated timeframe for the interviews was 1 hour, but consideration was provided based on participants' schedules and their desire to continue or stop talking. Each participant was given notice in the participant request

letter I sent asking for their participation in the study that I would record the discussion with two audio recorders. Eleven community partners who were identified by college center staff as fitting into one of the sample categories participated in interviews. Three community partners were seasoned, three were growing, two had opted out of continuing to participate, and three were K–12 partners.

The questions for the interviews were developed from the literature and document reviews, as well as the focus group analysis. Below are the interview questions:

- What characteristics and definitions would you use to describe service-learning?
- Why were you and your organization motivated to participate, continue participating, or quit participating in service-learning?
- Describe the depth of reciprocity you have observed in service-learning collaborations in regards to benefits and giving.
- Describe how service-learning supports your organization's identity and mission.
- What are some of the characteristics you have observed in successful and nonsuccessful service-learning collaborations?
- Describe examples of collaborations extending beyond service-learning (e.g., faculty becoming a board member, being asked to guest speak in class, hiring service-learners)
- How does your organization recognize and/or share the work service-learners do within your organization?
- Describe the ending of a service-learning collaboration and the extent to

which feedback and evaluation occur.

## Field Notes

I kept field notes during all of the interviews and the focus group. My notes included comments about my observations of participants' interactions with each other when discussing topics during the focus group. I also logged observations during the individual interviews to assist with any questions that arose during analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Observations often assist researchers by providing an additional source of information about the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). These notes assisted with my theme development as I separated the groups based on their comments to help me determine whether there were different themes that emerged about the perceived roles of college centers within the sites and across sites.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis might involve a number of procedures through which "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). Essentially, analysis uses standard procedures to observe, measure, and communicate with others about a participant's nature of reality (Wolcott, 2001). No set criteria has been established for analyzing case study research, but an important consideration is to maintain separation with individual cases and across case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). Individual cases possess situational findings specific to the individual case (Stake, 2006) as well as within-case theme analysis (Creswell, 2007). I used the same analytic procedures at each site and then carried these

analytic procedures over to a cross-case analysis. These procedures are listed below and were followed by additional procedures when comparing data from all four cases. This provided a feasible plan for data interpretation for each site and across sites.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) employed seven phases of analytic procedures, including organizing data, immersion in data, category and theme generation, coding of data, interpreting data, searching for alternative understanding of findings, and writing the final report. Before beginning my analysis, I revisited the data to make sure they had been stored within their specific case site file. Patton (1990) suggested assembling the raw case data, constructing a case record by organizing the raw data, and editing it into a management package, and finally writing a case study narrative to provide a portrayal of each case. Narratives written about these cases were not exhaustive, but served as resources as I began reading transcripts and coding the data. Categories and emerging themes were sought out during immersion and took form during the coding process.

Coding is a process that allows researchers to invest in the data by reviewing them and identifying themes within them (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I asked my peer researcher to review my categories and themes to determine that the data segments drawn were actually useful and central to the case (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Utilizing my peer researcher also alleviated possibilities for alternative understandings of the linkages to or inferences from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). After conclusions had been determined for each case, I then compared cases to seek out common themes across them. The three cases used within this study differed in context, so I examined the characteristics of the different contexts to determine whether participants had different perspectives at their unique sites. It is also

noted that although this analytic design was feasible, qualitative research often requires flexibility (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Morrow, 2005). Flexibility in this study occurred as some community partners had more time for interviews than others, while some had to stop during the interviews to deal with organizational issues.

## Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers differ from quantitative researchers in their understanding of what makes research valid and reliable. Under the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, "terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). Other terms used by qualitative researchers when describing validity and reliability include soundness (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), quality of goodness, and foundations of truth and knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Charmaz (2005) provided a detailed list of criteria for credibility, which emphasized the researcher achieving an "intimate familiarity with the setting or topic" (p. 528). A researcher's goal with credibility is to provide a detailed description of participants and settings. My detail became more in-depth as I identified actual participants and reviewed documents describing the context for each case. These descriptions should assist other researchers in determining whether their research study has similar characteristics and whether they might transfer design or findings from this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to their specific study or sample (Yin, 2009).

Qualitative researchers argue that "the social world is always being constructed and that the concept of replication is itself problematic" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 203). Researchers should take into account possible changes to contexts or phenomena

because it is problematic to assume an unchanging world (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I used the same data collection procedures and analytic steps at each site and across data types and documented these procedures and steps so each case was treated as if it were the same one being examined over again (Yin, 2009). Finally, confirmability involves the ability of others to make sense of a researcher's inferences and interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). On-going examination of my interpretations of and inferences from the data took place throughout the project with my peer researcher as she reviewed my research questions and analysis for bias and misunderstanding. Consideration was given throughout the study to ensure elements of trustworthiness were met.

I sent an e-mail asking my interview participants if they wished to see the themes found in the study, or if they preferred to just see the final results. This e-mail also asked for any additional insight in case they had forgotten to mention something during the interview. All of the interview participants indicated they preferred to see the final results of the study rather than the themes. This process of asking for member checking affords participants an opportunity to review data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions (Creswell, 2007). Member checking can help provide accuracy and credibility within the study (Creswell, 2007), but the extent of their involvement with member checking is up to participants.

## Alternative Understanding

I looked for alternative explanations for my findings. My peer researcher played an important role in reviewing my themes. Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted that "alternative explanations always exist" (p. 162). A review of my narratives, analytic

memos, and journal also assisted me in determining what alternative explanations existed and how prevalent these might be. Two alternative explanations were explored. The first was personal life, which was tied to engagement levels by all sides. Community partners stated that the amount of energy and time they had to give to service-learning collaborations mattered, as did the energy and time students had to give. Some community partners hinted at how their personal lives and student's personal lives sometimes influenced the energy and time that could be invested in the service-learning collaborations. A second alternative understanding is that personality seemed to matter in these collaborations. Personalities that clicked seemed to be key to the collaborations that further developed into stronger relationships, while at other times faculty, community partners, and students had conflicting opinions. After identifying these alternative explanations, I reviewed my findings to determine whether they provided the most reasonable explanations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and felt, along with my peer reviewer, that these two alternative explanations did not override the main study findings. They should, however, be further explored in future studies with directly related questions.

## Ethical and Political Considerations

I followed the policies and procedures of the University of Utah Institutional Review Board (IRB). A vulnerable population was not foreseen with this study. I had previous relationships with many of the participants given my background with service-learning; however, all procedures were followed, and a participant letter, which outlined their rights as participants, was e-mailed to everyone who agreed to participate. I was also clear from the beginning about my intentions to learn more about community partner

perceptions of and motivations toward service-learning. The participants were not identified in the report of research, but identification did take place in a broader sense in terms of mission, size, and stakeholder. This helped me note whether there were varying opinions among organizations with differing sizes, missions, and stakeholders. I was aware of time constraints and efforts of this study's participants and acknowledge the need for reciprocity to exist (Creswell, 2007), as I respected participants' request for certain interview times, dates, and time limits rather than pressing my own time constraints.

All participants who elected to be involved with this study did so voluntarily. All of the participants were asked for permission to publish their insights. The only foreseeable risk heading into this study was the possibility that a community partner did not feel safe in discussing specifics about the collaboration in the interview. Fortunately, this did not occur. A final copy of this study will be distributed to each participant so they can reflect on and compare their own experience with others.

Finally, it was my job as a researcher to ensure the cases were examined fairly and that any bias in the interpretations was acknowledged. My use of a peer researcher and acknowledgement of my own experiences with service-learning were tactics I engaged in to maintain fairness and prevent ethical dilemmas. Also I recognized that my decisions while designing, conducting, and publishing this study might have ethical ramifications (Haverkamp, 2005), such as criticisms about one or more of the higher education institutions or community partners. This did not seem to be an issue with the participants. Finally, I stored all data on a secure and password protected hard drive, as well as using a secure and password protected external software for backup. All physical

data were stored in a file cabinet, which locks and to which only I had the key.

This study sought to further develop the literature centered on community partner voice in regards to service-learning collaborations. This qualitative study explored community partner voice through interviews, a focus group, and document review to deepen the understanding of community partner perceptions, motivations, and shaping of service-learning collaborations because most of the service-learning literature has focused on student learning and faculty development. Findings from this study will be shared with community partners, as well as in an academic dissertation to further the theories and practices centered on service-learning collaborations.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

In Chapter 3, I described document review, a focus group, and interviews as the three data collection methods for this study as well as the methods I employed to analyze the collected data. This chapter discusses the findings that emerged from the data, which include four major themes. The findings focused on the levels of *expectations* and *investment* by all stakeholders involved in the collaborations. These levels were greatly influenced by *communication* among stakeholders. Further, the findings showed *varying echelons of collaborations* in regard to depths of reciprocity, extensions beyond service-learning and framing where service-learners fell within an organization. It should be noted that overlap does exist in the analysis of individual findings among the four major themes. For example, *communication* is built out of *expectations* and *investment* to some degree, while the varying *echelons of collaborations* are developed from the levels set forth with *expectations, investment,* and *communication* among and toward the stakeholder groups involved. Despite this overlap, these four themes clearly evolved from the data and emerged independent from each other. These four themes were mentioned repeatedly and also carried independent characteristics that did not include overlap.

Although varying *echelons of collaborations* was not a theme from the focus group data, likely in part because the focus group participants were staff members at

higher education institutions rather than the community partner organizations, components of this theme were mentioned in the focus group.

To recap, the following question guided this study:

- How did service-learning collaborations support the organizational identity of community partners?

To support this guiding question, the following subquestions were explored:

- How do community partners view service-learning collaborations: as partnerships, relationships, projects, or something else?
- Do community partners vary in their development, motivation, opinion, and expectation of service-learning collaborations?
- How do community partners view service-learning collaborations in terms of opportunities such as developing human capital, social networking, and stakeholder involvement?
- To what extent does having a service-learning experience/s prior to working in a community-based organization influence community based staff's willingness to collaborate?
- How are service-learning collaborations structured in terms of stakeholder involvement?
- What support systems do community partners have in place for service-learning collaborations?

To contextualize the description of findings noted in this chapter, an overview of participant and organizational characteristics is provided. This overview is important because the findings are unique to this study based on these participants' responses. I

then examine each of the four themes individually and explore how the themes relate to each other.

## Participant and Organizational Characteristics

All three of the college center executive directors, who responded to the request to participate, opted to have their staff participate instead. The executive directors attributed their decision to have staff participate to the fact that the staff worked more closely with community partners and had a better sense of what community partners found success and struggled with. Two of the institutions had one representative while the other had two representatives because one was newer to the position.

Two of the 11 community partners were executive directors, one was with a chief operating officer, one was a board member, and the final seven were staff assuming a title similar to volunteer/outreach/community coordinator/manager. Each of these seven staff was either solely responsible for or in part responsible for, volunteer management for their organization, while the others encompassed volunteer management responsibilities as well. Five of the 11 interview participants were male, while the other six were female. All 11 participants fit one of the four sampling criteria (growing, seasoned, opted out, or K–12) established for this study, as did their organization. All three of the K–12 participants met the seasoned criteria.

Although conducting 12 interviews was the original goal of this study, it was determined that the final interview was not feasible. This was in part due to multiple requests for two identified opted out partners by one institution, who either never responded or responded with an email containing notes on their experiences with service-learning and declined to be interviewed. This was also due in part to an understanding

reached between me and that higher education institution that there were no additional community partners who met the criteria of opted out because those who were identified as no longer participating simply were not because the staff member committed to service-learning had left the community partner, and no other staff member was willing to take it over. This alone was a finding related to why some community partners elected to not continue collaborating with service-learning.

Of the 11 community partners interviewed, three represented K–12 organizations, one a government agency, and the other seven nonprofits. The Utah Nonprofits Association (UNA.org, 2015) lists 13 categories for nonprofits, developed from the base charitable giving categories set up under nonprofit law. Using the UNA categories, the seven nonprofits were identified to primarily fall first into the following categories: children's services (two agencies), environmental and animals (two agencies), health (two agencies), and human services (one agency). The K–12 and government agency do not fall into a nonprofit category, but to help characterize their organizations, the K–12 would fit into education and the government agency would fit into public and societal benefit.

Of the seven nonprofits, six had paid staff while the other was moving from an all-volunteer organization to include a paid staff member. Two of the nonprofits were under the umbrella of national organizations, while one of the participants interviewed founded their nonprofit. All of the nonprofits had an annual budget with gross receipts over $50,000, which is the base tax-reporting requirement for charitable organizations (IRS.gov, 2015).

The K–12 organizations included representatives from two individual schools and

a school district; each individual was identified as the person of contact by the higher education institutions. The government agency functions much like a nonprofit with a mission-centered community commitment, but was not designated a nonprofit and received support from its form of government as well as other resources. Table 4.1 represents the interview participants by describing which college center they represented; if they were a seasoned, growing, opted out, or K–12 community partner; a pseudonym used throughout the study to reference their comments; a representative job title; and the type of community agency.

## Themes

Four themes emerged from the data analysis for this study: *expectations, investment, communication,* and varying *echelons of collaborations*. The four themes are discussed in the next section with participant quotes interwoven in the discussion. The discussion also highlights subthemes that were identified during the analysis.

### Expectations

Community partners mentioned throughout the interviews the hopes, wishes, and desires they hoped to achieve through service-learning collaborations. Community partners believed it was fair for them to have specific hopes, wishes, and desires as they entered service-learning collaborations. Examples of these hopes, wishes, and desires included staff capacity to complete projects that the current staff were unable to finish, a new energy that led to innovative ideas or creative ways of approaching programs and problems, and new advocates for organizations who would promote additional volunteer opportunities. At the same time, community partners also wanted students and faculty to

have hopes, wishes, and desires for their collaborations, including learning more about their organization's mission and the clientele they served. Community partners mentioned operational components they expected to provide for service-learning collaborations and also mentioned expected struggles and successes they thought accompanied service-learning collaborations. Examples of operational components were staff time and student turnover at the end of a semester, while examples of struggles and successes included the inconsistent quality of final indirect projects. After much review of the data, I decided on the term expectation for this theme because it encompassed and portrayed the collective nature of participants related to their goals with service-learning collaborations. Although community partners explained their goal of meeting expectations, they were willing to be flexible with these expectations and the processes that accompanied them. This section details the findings around expectations and explores the subthemes of developing and communicating expectations, reciprocity, and flexibility as discussed by community partners and college center staff.

Having multiple stakeholders involved with service-learning collaborations often creates an inconsistent level of expectations around delivery and results. There also was a struggle with expectations because seven of the 11 community partners often intertwined past experiences with service-learning with volunteering, interning, practicum, and other experiential practices in the community. I frequently had to ask for clarification about whether the community partner was speaking specifically about service-learners or other students participating in experiential practices. Although this lumping of practices did occur, I believe clarifying questions offered a clearer picture as the participants separated service-learning experiences from other experiential activities.

Developing and communicating expectations

The focus group collectively felt that all stakeholders were more invested when they had thought through their expectations ahead of time. Although this did not ensure success with collaborations, it did increase the likelihood of benefit for all stakeholders because they had final outcomes in mind from the beginning of the process. This thought process prior to starting collaborations could serve as a road map. Mountain's K–12 partner, Fred, stressed that service-learning requires a lot of preparation time ahead of and after collaborations, but that ensuring a proper fit ahead of time could increase the chance of success:

> …in terms of not so great is having unrealistic expectations for the people involved, right. A school might need someone to tutor two kids to get their … score up, kind of thing, right. But it might take some time to find the right people or person to do that kind of work, because yes, we need it done and we're concerned about that child, but if we just put people there who may not want to be in that type of service learning relationship, it doesn't really work out for anyone and so there's, I guess the other side to that is the patience that comes along with it and the strategy, right. Learning what people's assets and strengths are, what they don't like to do, I mean, it's a perfectly responsible question to ask a service learner, "Are there things you hate doing?"

Further exploring patience and avoiding having too high of expectations too soon was described by Star's seasoned community partner, Dave:

> I just think sometimes community partners expect too much too fast, and I'm just steadfast in my belief that you've got to think long term because I look at everything that the university brings to us that started with service-learning.

Star's college center staff member offered a perspective complementary to the seasoned community partner's perspective noted above. This opinion was echoed by the other focus group participants who also observed the struggles faculty, students, and community partners have related to high expectations without the support systems necessary to attain them. Below is Star's staff member's thought:

> I think it's unfair for some community partners or even faculty members who have never had a working partnership to jump right in and within three weeks have outlined this amazing project and expect it to yield high results as they are just kind of making it up on the fly and thinking I have to get this done by December. While it's rather instead starting to fail, it's okay to build from the ground up and this being a two or three year partnership, we can constantly be working together and make something amazing.

The college center staff all agreed that expectations need to be realistic, but also that these expectations could only be met if they were communicated among the stakeholders and all of the stakeholders were invested at the level expected. An additional thought around this was the time it took to develop expectations for projects as students, faculty and community partners come together to communicate clear guidelines and outcomes. Eve added the following:

> There are students who are first gaining kind of an understanding and familiarity with our organization, and secondly, there is a familiarity and understanding gained by me if not our whole organization of the student and the learning institution they are coming from so that we can have kind of a mutual place to meet at. My expectations from the service learning situation is not specific productivity but it's about, it lives, somewhere in that growing and understanding of organizations and creating partnerships. It's much more about that conversation and network building.

The above quote reemphasized the notion that all community partners expected some benefit from participating in service-learning, but that this benefit did not need to be only about the outcome. Sometimes the process, additional gains from word of mouth references, interest in returning for additional student volunteer opportunities with the organization, and collaborative nature around service-learning also fulfilled expectations. This collaborative nature provided reciprocal opportunities for all.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity describes the relationship between what stakeholders input into a collaboration and what they receive and whether the inputs and outcomes are expected to be equal in measure or can vary. The majority of community partners were willing to be patient with service-learning collaborations, expecting that some collaborations would yield higher returns than others. As part of this, community partners were able to describe how reciprocity aligned with their expectations. All described the importance of each stakeholder benefitting from the collaboration either during the process or with the outcome. A couple of participants mentioned having very specific expectations for the collaborations and were clear that they did not have time for certain elements of service-learning when they agreed to participate. Bill said the following:

> There's a range of reciprocity. Some, well first of all, I think you need to delineate between undergrad and grad because of reciprocity in undergrad programs is usually much more lopsided. I know that usually instructors try not to require too much of community partners, in terms of commitment in time, etc. But the undergrad students need a lot more hand-holding and they don't end up producing products that are as useful or as complete. I've had much better success with graduate service-learning classes. Service-learning doesn't work very well if you have to hold hands, and graduate students usually can problem solve or are expected to problem solve and do a lot of the critical thinking to develop something—something of value. A service-learning program that requires me to do a lot of the critical thinking at multiple junctures along the way is too much of my energy into it for what I get out of it. I could just do it myself.

Bill is an executive director who discussed the importance of clearly knowing that the expected investment the organization was going to make in the collaboration would be matched by students for the benefit of all stakeholders. Bill's honesty shed light on another popular wish: community partners admitted wanting students to be forthcoming about their level of investment so the community partners could set reasonable expectations rather than having to adjust throughout the process. Most community

partners felt they could work with students if students acknowledged they had a lot going on in their lives and the service was not a priority or that they were not interested in the service. Clyde, who is an opted out community partner, acknowledged that his community partner work was different in its nature and that they did not have to be flexible with student scheduling because they had a large, committed volunteer pool already in place. "We are a very fortunate organization because we have more volunteers than work for them to do. One volunteer opportunity is competitive and they volunteer on their own free will versus someone being sent from school." This perspective also tied back to the expected investment level, but illustrated a preconceived notion of the community partner that service-learners were not as committed as other volunteers.

On the other hand, four community partners admitted always acknowledging when they did not have time. Of the four, two were seasoned community partners and two were K–12 partners who also fell into the seasoned category. "I think it [the reciprocity of the collaboration] really varies tremendously, and I think it's dependent on what I'm asking for because so much of it depends on how much time I have to give." This quote from Eve illustrated the importance of community partners setting reasonable expectations based on their own levels of investment.

Finding a balance between scheduling, student interest, and community partner need seemed to be a key strategy with collaborations. The K–12 representative for Star, Jackie, discussed how service-learning had become an important support system for capacity since her school has had to fluctuate teacher aide and other aide hours due to budgetary constraints under the Affordable Care Act requirements around benefits. This was mentioned in relation to both direct and indirect services that support teachers and

others in schools. At the same time, Jackie discussed her willingness to help students find placements that interested them and were convenient for completing their service. Tree's K–12 partner, Annie, also stressed this:

> I think we're just really, we want to be strategic and creative, and one thing that we try to do is make sure that whatever arrangements that we're making with these students, it's beneficial for them and for us. It's not, "well, we have this project, do you want to do it or not?" but it's really sitting down together beforehand because there's a lot that could happen here so I never want to pigeonhole myself into "well, this is the only project we're doing, right." Because sometimes you might not find the right person for that [project], but you're going to come across a group of students or one student who'd be a great fit for one of the other things that are a priority for me.

All three K–12 partners believed spending more time on the front end of the project would help with the process in which they had less flexibility such as direct service hours that must be completed during specific days and times. Part of the willingness to be patient with service-learning by all community partners seemed to stem from the expectation that at least occasionally they would get an "out of the ballpark" service-learning student or group who would produce something amazing and sustainable. Dave discussed how they still used a rewards closet that was designed by a service-learner years ago, while K–12 partner Annie said their community is receiving a completely revamped cookbook because of a service-learning class. College center staff who participated in the focus group also observed the situations mentioned above, and Mountain's staff member noted the following:

> They (community partners) realize that they may go three semesters with fairly mediocre students, but if they get one that is amazing and really buys into the organization—you hear stories about the people who volunteer at an organization in college and then they are still working there 15 years later.

Although not all service-learning collaborations yield outstanding returns, the community partners were willing to take the high returns with the low returns because

they believed they benefitted formally or informally from the collaboration. The staff interviewed during the focus group felt that community partners gave the most to make things happen and often did not communicate with them if their expectations failed to come to fruition because they were happy to benefit even a little. The following was discussed by Mountain's staff member:

> Nonprofits are so dependent, or the ones I have been in and associated with are so dependent on volunteers. It's such a source, even if there are crappy students or projects that don't work, there is such potential for partnerships with an academic institution that community partners are bending over backwards to partner with us. You can see why, but then maybe sometimes to their detriment if they don't speak up on those issues.

Star's seasoned partner, Dave, believed his agency benefitted more than the students or faculty, which made being flexible with collaborations worth it. Dave also credited service-learning collaborations with exceeding the agency's expectations when it came to future opportunities that went beyond the initial collaboration. The majority of community partners echoed the sentiment of believing they received more benefit than students and faculty. Collaborations exceeding expectations seemed to be something that happened sporadically more than consistently because there was no guarantee that investment levels would support high expectations.

Flexibility

Flexibility allows stakeholder approaches toward service-learning collaborations to vary, rather than requiring a set process or method. All 11 community partners mentioned flexibility in some form or another as a key element in their successes or struggles with service-learning collaborations. Community partners felt they needed to be flexible with academic institutions to varying degrees, and ultimately all community

partners still participating were willing to be flexible. Flexibility around scheduling, along with flexibility toward student interest and learning growth and community partner needs were most often mentioned. Eve summarized components of flexibility in the following:

> I would say the key tool is acceptance of the busyness of the student. I would say it's really, really key for the organization, again, to not really have expectations of productivity, but to have hopes for connecting and networking. And I would say in terms of the key to productivity with them [students], would be it's really on the organization to be flexible and to find how service-learners want to be engaged and how it can fit into their schedule best. Because the nine-to-five business of being in the organization is not really conducive to learners necessarily, and if we're okay with that, then we actually get tons of benefits of working with service-learners. Again, nothing's very tangible, and that's okay.

All three of the seasoned community partners were more than willing to be flexible with student schedules because they had participated in enough service-learning collaborations to realize flexibility was expected in an effort to increase faculty and student investment. Even investment of their own time would vary during the collaboration. The seasoned partners also acknowledged that "life happens" and sometimes unforeseen circumstances arose, or students and the partner realized they had overcommitted themselves during the semester. All of the community partners were willing to be flexible with scheduling around indirect service projects, such as brochure creation, curriculum development, projects to support fundraising, and survey research. On the other end, flexibility around scheduling was more difficult for direct service projects, including tutoring, mentoring, teaching a class, or physical labor. This was due to predetermined K–12, after-school, and/or workshop hours and dates that could not be changed by community partners. Several of the community partners mentioned students failing to show up for direct service opportunities and committing only to their required

hours if more was needed. Only one mentioned not receiving a final product from an indirect project. Dave, from Star, noted "they're right on the money with their 25 hours and you don't ever see them again" when describing students who were only interested in meeting their mandated hour requirement rather than in the collaboration.

Some community partners did identify students as the ones who needed to be flexible. Seasoned partner Carol, from Tree, elaborated on how adopting an expected, flexible approach has benefitted them and highlighted the importance of students being flexible as well:

> I would say being able to be flexible has been huge for us. Yeah, on our end, being flexible, but also on their [service-learners] end being flexible. So, knowing that you're going into a group of kids, I mean, it's like any group of kids, but maybe that activity really isn't going to work and you can think on your feet really fast and come up with another activity, but also being flexible in terms of scheduling and things like that.

Carol's quote highlights a desire for all stakeholders to be somewhat flexible in their approach to service-learning. It also showcases the need for students to be flexible because children are unpredictable as an audience for direct service as their moods change from day to day. This flexibility also tied into developing expectations for projects.

Two seasoned and K–12 partners noted that they were able to find alternative ways to work with students, whether through additional staff support or a new project. Mary said she had tried to work with students regarding their interests, but sometimes wished students would be open and flexible as well, which also tied to expectations:

> And, you know, just exploring opportunities, trying to get them [service-learners] to think maybe out of the box a little bit about service-learning. That's sometimes disappointing when I think I'm giving them opportunities that aren't just the [direct service] opportunities because there's so much other stuff behind the scenes that's involved with selecting families and church relations and fundraising

> and communications and PR and all that stuff, family support and all that I would like to see them get involved with. And some of them take me up on those, kind of, out of the box opportunities and some don't. But, nevertheless I do like to talk to everybody about [our organization] and students included.

As described earlier, Mountain's college center staff member argued that sometimes community partners accommodate students and faculty too much and often do not see these accommodations reciprocated. Tree's college center staff member followed up with the following:

> I think the most common indicator for failure that I see is projects where the community partner accepts students solely for the benefit of the student. If the community partner doesn't understand or believe that they can benefit, if they don't actually think it's reciprocal going into the relationships, my experience is nothing good comes out of it for the student.

Above all, the community partners who went into the collaborations with doable expectations spoke most positively about service-learning collaborations and seemed most willing to be flexible in what they expected to gain from the collaborations. Clearly communicated and realistic expectations allowed for more flexibility, which in turn yielded reciprocal benefit.

## Investment

A common theme throughout the interviews was, "you get out of the collaborations what you put into them." This theme rang true for community partners and for all stakeholders involved. Community partners believed that when they put a lot of time and energy into service-learning collaborations, there was a worthy return on investment. They also believed this outcome was true for students and faculty. The term investment defines this theme because it encompasses both the giving and receiving elements of service-learning collaborations that greatly influence each other. The

following subthemes emerged in the data: return on investment, prior investment, stakeholder investment, impact, and recognition. These five subthemes supported the overarching theme of investment because the levels of investment influenced impact and because recognition did not need to occur to note deep levels of investment.

The investment levels of stakeholders involved in the service-learning collaborations were not consistent. College service centers had varying levels of investment related to the number of service-learning trainings offered for community partners, assistance with student placement and faculty introductions, and support for feedback and evaluations. This was in part due to staff availability, priorities, and assignments, but also because of past successes or struggles with trainings and placement support. Student investment greatly fluctuated from collaboration to collaboration due in part to student time commitments, interest in the organization and class, and preparation of students by the faculty member. Students' investment level as perceived by community partners varied due in part to the intermixing of experiential learning practices and the expectations placed on them for classroom grading. Community partners also admitted that student investment could thrive only if community partners were equally invested in supporting the collaborations. Building on this, community partners who were willing to acknowledge their investment early in the collaboration seemed to find the most success in finding flexible ways to meet expectations.

Community partners credited service-learning with helping them support their mission and identity through meeting programmatic and service goals while garnering additional funding and new idea development. Five of the community partners were especially excited about the fresh perspectives and energy service-learners brought to

their organizations. Of these five, three were K–12 organizations, one was in human services, and the other was an environmental organization. The common theme among these five was that staff capacity had reached its maximum, and service-learners were full of new energy that could be used to complete projects and perform direct service. These organizations also said their staff had reached some capacity related to ideas for programming and service and that they welcomed service-learner input. One of Star's opted out community partners who declined an interview provided the following written feedback:

> Our challenges fall into two broad categories. First, is the time investment to plan a project and bring the student[s] up to speed is often greater than the time saved by their involvement—typical volunteer management issue. Secondly, the ultimate completion and follow through as the project [and semester] reach an end rarely meet the goals set out at the project's inception. Attention waivers elsewhere...particularly with graduating students.

This community partner addressed a long-standing assumption that those close to graduating are "checked out" and are no longer engaged. Although this assumption may be true in some cases, there is no clear evidence that this scenario is true in service-learning collaborations. This community partner was the only one to single out graduating students, but they did point out additional concerns mentioned by other community partners regarding whether the investment in the collaboration outweighs or equals the return. The three opted out community partners all noted informally or formally that the continual low return on investment was enough to negate the benefits from the collaborations and that this was one reason they were no longer involved in service-learning.

Return on investment

Community partners are not uniform; therefore, they likely have a variety of expectations when it comes to return on investment. Some may seek equal return for staff hours invested in service-learning collaborations, while other community partners may believe any return was worth their staff's time because they were able to network with students. A challenge with weighing return on investment is that service-learning collaborations change when students rotate each semester. Tree's K–12 partner, Annie, acknowledged differentiation among returns from collaborations, but in the end believed the organization benefitted in some form and therefore that the collaborations were worth the investment on the giving side:

> We have lots of areas where we need additional support and we don't have the resources to pay for it, and so why not be thoughtful about how you can make those opportunities happen? At the same time, you're allowing somebody to have an experience that they need, and so for us, it's selfish you know. Number one, we get to have a lot of support either for the schools or for the students directly, or for the parents, that we don't have to pay for and we don't have to worry about grant funding and keeping things alive. Honestly, that's probably why this relationship keeps growing.

From a managerial perspective, Annie believed it has been difficult to break down the costs and benefits of service-learning collaborations. She mentioned this lack of breakdown as a barrier to better explaining the impacts of service-learning collaborations and described the following related to deciding when the investment is worth the return:

> It's so hard to talk about because of the number of projects, especially the number of years that I've been doing this. You know, definitely there have been more (service-learning collaborations) that I would place a higher, you know, if I had to put a dollar figure on it, some have had a higher value returned than invested, much higher. Others, it really comes down to the students participating. If you have to have a lot of your own supervision and support because they just are completely lost, then obviously that's hard for us to manage if it's a one-to-one ratio of my time to their time—then that's not really helpful. I'll just do the work. But most times, we end up with people who really want to excel in the work that

> they're doing, they really want a good experience, and so they put in their own time, and again I think a good indicator that it is worth it—it is a good investment that just keeps growing.

This investment of time seemed to tie back to clear expectations as well as communication. Tree's partner, Bill, mentioned the investment level of the faculty member related to the amount of time allotted to the service-learning projects "so that students can actually get into it and accomplish something." Bill, who was a former service-learning student, believed that faculty had to have a priority in place for service-learning to reach what it could. This is an interesting perspective given his participation in service-learning as both a student and community partner. Bill added:

> I did a service-learning partnership last fall where it was all semester long, but they [service-learners] had a bunch of other assignments along the way—there was some good procrastination. Some of the products that I got out of that were not very good because they had a too many other things that they were working on. It really wasn't a priority. I think that when the curriculum of a class is built around a service-learning opportunity as the primary mode of delivering a curriculum, it's much more successful.

Bill is an executive director, and tied the idea back to the same approach his organization has with employees. Employees who have several job tasks will likely not make service-learning a priority and invest in the collaborations unless they have set expectations they believe are worth the investment. No other community partner directly mentioned faculty prioritization of service-learning as the main student investment for the class, but informally the majority of partners mentioned students balancing several things with school as a detractor from the collaboration.

Tree's opted out partner, Grace, also explained how her organization had better success with students involved in internships and practicums related to investment and return, but these placements also faced several stringent rules from their national

organization. Grace added the following related to the investment levels of stakeholders involved in collaborations:

> If the professor sets it [service-learning collaboration] up, we almost always have had a project that was worth something and benefitted us. A lot of times when the student comes in on their own, they make it work for them, not necessarily for us, I guess. And that's not always the case, but probably more often than not. If a professor sets it up, they've [service-learners] always understood our mission. If the student is coming in on their own, it's typically half and half who understand it.

Prior investment

Service-learning is something that includes a variety of stakeholders, including stakeholders who may have participated with this form of learning in a variety of roles. Of the 11 participants interviewed, four had participated in service-learning as students, while two partners mentioned that they wished they had based on their experience in the partner role. Also, two of the 11 interviewed had been instructors at one of the higher education institutions, so they valued service-learning from the pedagogical side as well. Of the two who had taught, only one incorporated service-learning into their curriculum. The four community partners who had participated as students had mixed reviews of their student experience, which carried over to their community partner experiences. Two of these were in the opted out community partner category, while one was in the K–12 group, and the other was identified as a growing community partner. Tree's partner, Bill, mentioned the following:

> I've been a student who has participated in service-learning projects and have had a lot of great experiences, and I felt like as a student they're incredibly valuable. On the other side, as someone who works with a limited amount of resources in an organization, I also recognize that there is untapped resources in students and the work that they want to do to help me push my organization's goals.

Tree's partner, Grace, noted that service-learning had not fallen into place easily

for her organization since they did not have a lot of flexibility in projects due to being under the umbrella of a national organization. The national rules were not conducive to working with service-learners all of the time. Grace added:

> I believe in service-learning. It may not sound like it, but I think it's important for the students to do it and be exposed. I think there are so many students that get to college and have never been exposed to philanthropy.

Grace believed it was better to not invest in service-learning unless it was a good fit and her staff's investment of time and energy would yield a return on investment for her organization. For example, Star's partner, Jackie, stressed that one challenge for public schools is that they are limited in what service-learners can teach: a religious studies course could not come to the school and offer classes on religion because of the requirement of separation of church and state. This falls in line with investing in collaborations when the fit is in place. This acknowledgement supported the earlier finding that organizations that invested in collaborations and developed expectations in the beginning were more likely to have success.

Stakeholder investment

A variety of stakeholders likely equates to a variety of skillsets, availability and interest levels related to service-learning collaborations. Faculty investment was an underlying theme from all community partners, although about half said they would still place student investment ahead of faculty investment. Faculty and student investment were also frequently mentioned related to communication. Tree's community partner, Annie, expressed:

> I've had some faculty actually have me fill out forms or call me and interview me, and I've had others who probably don't know what their students did. I think that I'm in a place where, well, I'm not going to chase them down. If they want to

know, I'll tell them if it was a good experience.

Star's partner, Mary, outlined the role the faculty member played in investing in the project:

> …I think for me the most reciprocal partnerships were the ones with these larger class projects where their instructor is committed to the project and the students probably picked up on that. And, you know I'm sure there were motivations also for trying to get a good grade in the class and so on, but there seemed to be a greater level of engagement and commitment on the student's part for these projects. And I'm sure some of that was just a function of the faculty were putting in more time, they had more at stake, and so on, but it seemed to embrace our mission more and to feel like they were making a real contribution and so…

The K–12 organizations seemed to view the relationships similarly. Tree's partner Annie mentioned the same faculty partners over and over when discussing successful collaborations and future ideas. Although she had these relationships, she also was willing to work with new partners as well. Annie said the following about service-learning collaborations, "And definitely, it comes back to, more often than not it's (success of the collaboration) not about capability or knowledge, it's about willingness." Willingness to invest in collaborations was a key component to success.

Of the seasoned community partners, Star's Dave said he was always open to new collaborations with Star because he trusted the college center to help him find good fits. Mountain's seasoned partner, Eve, said she also was willing to take on new collaborations because she had a positive opinion that something good came out of the collaborations. Eve had partnered with two of the college centers in this study and an additional one not included in the study. Tree's seasoned partner, Carol, was also willing to accept new collaborations because the added capacity offered new opportunities for her clients. However, it was evident that all three preferred to continue working with the same partners and students they had built relationships with because they were able to

invest from the get-go rather than spending time continually setting up new expectations.

The growing group was the most open to new collaborations because they were searching for outstanding partners to model after. Mountain's growing partner, Clyde, not only collaborated with service-learners, but worked to help fellow organizations place service-learners. This additional effort provided opportunities for Clyde's organization to invest in working with new partners on both the community partner and higher education side.

The opted out group said the investment problems were as much on their end as the students and faculty's end, but did place a lot of blame on the faculty for not preparing students enough. The opted out group also believed that college centers and faculty needed to do more to educate students about the burden community partners faced when placing students last minute and understanding that when community partners said no to service learning it was not personal. Answering no meant that the community partner was not able to reciprocate an investment into the service-learning project that would help guide it to success. This group believed clearer communication around community partners' service-learning expectations would lead to more planning that in turn would lead to an increased investment.

Wrapping up stakeholder investment, Tree's K–12 partner, Annie, countered its growing partner Bill's earlier claim that year in school mattered more than investment level. Community partners did not discuss year in school frequently, and it should be noted that Salt Lake Community College has fewer years to consider as their students typically earn associate degrees compared to bachelor and graduate degrees at Weber State University and the University of Utah. These degrees carry additional years spent

in school. Below is Annie's counteropinion:

> Yeah, yeah, most times I know. Maybe not if they're freshmen or not, but definitely undergrads as opposed to those working on, you know, master's coursework or more than that, but you know, what's surprising, too, is that it's never an indicator of quality of projects. Yeah. It's never an indicator of quality, because I've been completely blown away by projects that were taken on by, you know, second year students and then completely disappointed by somebody working on their Master's because I was excited, thinking "oh, they're really deep into it" and then they're just like, not invested. It really comes down to the investment, you know, how much do they care about this really, and not just for this community, but for their own experience.

Impact

Another emerging subtheme under investment was impact. Impact included direct impact on students through learning, as well as impact on clients served. Organizationally, impact reflected efforts to assist community partners with meeting their missions and everyday tasks that aligned with organizational identity. Service-learners had an impact on clients, but this direct impact was difficult to measure beyond hours served because many community partners did not have formal evaluation practices in place. Community partners believed impact came as a direct result of investment from students.

Organizations that need service-learners to fill direct service opportunities were more concerned about the investment from students than those providing primarily indirect service opportunities. Those that offered both options prioritized direct service. This seemed due, in part, to having clients in place to receive the direct service as opposed to being able to move the due date for a brochure. Mountain's partner, Fred, noted:

> I would say the deepest level of reciprocity is experienced between our [elementary] students and the service learners. That usually is the thing that I

> enjoy, and it's one of the major reasons why I keep doing it. [Elementary] students get so excited about having university people here. Whether they're teacher candidates or from the college of business—doesn't really matter. … Our students love having new faces here, and it's exciting when they build a relationship.

All 11 community partners believed service-learning helped them achieve their mission directly or indirectly through support services. None believed participating in service-learning resulted in mission creep or losing sight of purpose. Mountain's partner, Fred, noted:

> And the way service learning fits into that is, if you have university students or college students who are seeking a higher education, the transformation of life is kind of integrally connected to that, and it's a wonderful way for people to learn with us and from us and it supports the mission by saying to our community "We value people who are willing to come to our school and do their best, fail a couple of times, because that's what happens, but come back and say ok, I'm here, what can I do? What can I learn, what can I provide kind of thing."

Tree's seasoned partner, Carol, explained the following when examining how service-learners support her organization's mission:

> I think, as far as that goes, it really helps the kids to expose them to activities that they might be interested in later, and it also helps them learn skills in a different way than we would normally teach it. So, those stress management skills, I know even with our adult clients who have done, like, yoga, and stuff like that, it's just giving them [the kids] that ability to know that those are coping skills that they can use and things of that nature really do go with the mission and what we're trying to do, and also we have a big policy of diversity and things like that and they [service-learners] do an awesome job of incorporating that in the activities they do with their kids.

Community partners revisited the support service-learners provide toward their organization's mission when discussing the education of service-learners through exposure to their clients and services provided as well as serving the needs of their clients or providing services.

All 11 of the community partners who believed service-learning supported their organization's mission also believed service-learning supported their organizational

identity by helping them continue to do what they did. They tied identity more to human capital, idea generation, and increased opportunities beyond service-learning. Mountain's partner, Clyde, believed service-learners assisted his organization by providing capacity to run programs and fulfill other needs. Mountain's partner, Eve, said the following since her organization includes education as a major component of what they do: "I would say it [service-learning] supports our identity by basically working closely with young people who are diverse and bringing all kinds of their own interests and agenda to the table…"

Community partners found service-learning to be an opportunity for them to support their mission statements and identity. They also believed that collaborations were successful when they were able to gain something that benefited their mission and identity. Mountain's partner, Fred, stressed that the service-learning collaborations he had observed were most successful when there was an investment level from all that led to the impact of enlightenment or change in an individual along the way. Fred credited seeing these changes first hand as a driving force behind his individual investment in service-learning as a community partner and as faculty member who requires it in his class.

Six community partners attributed investing in service-learning as a way to earn additional funding, although this was not a primary motivator. Of these six, Star's seasoned partner, Dave, and growing partner, Mary, and Mountain's growing partner, Clyde, directly credited service-learning projects and recordable hours as a main reason they were able to obtain grants. Star's K–12 partner, Jackie, said she had never thought about reporting service-learning hours, but she would bring it up at their next staff

meeting. All but one participant said they lump service-learning hours with volunteer hours and that it was difficult to track the hours using the college center's requirements and also track the hours within their own grant requirements. All were willing to do this, though, because grant funding allowed community partners to develop and sustain programs and services that would provide impact.

Recognition

Recognition is an avenue to acknowledge service provided by students, time invested by community partners, and other stakeholders involved, but it requires time for formal recognition such as certificates and volunteer of the month displays or informal methods of in-person acknowledgement. While impact from service-learning collaborations mattered to community partners, not one of the 11 organizations interviewed had any information about, or highlights of, service-learning collaborations in my document review. Interviews revealed that although community partners valued service-learning collaborations and their impact, they were not invested in recognizing the impacts of the collaborations. Of the seven nonprofits interviewed, only Star's partners, Dave and Mary's, boards knew service-learning was a component their organization was invested in (it should be noted Dave is an executive director while Mary is on the board of her organization). Bill said his administration was aware of his service-learning investment, and the three K–12 partners also said their administrations knew about service-learning. All of the other nonprofits noted that their board was possibly sometimes aware of service-learning collaborations, but that this was unclear since most did not attend board meetings. Also, the two executive directors interviewed always knew, while the chief operating officer did not always know about service-

learning collaborations within their organizations, an issue that was also mentioned by others about their own management.

Related to recognizing service-learners, all three seasoned partners highlighted their collaborations in a newsletter, on a bulletin board, at a staff meeting, or in some other venue. One seasoned partner displayed photos of service-learners with their clients and the higher education institution's memorabilia in their facility, and Fred highlighted the service-learners on a staff bulletin board. Mountain's partner, Clyde, highlighted service-learners on this organization's blog and Facebook page. Star and Tree's partners, Mary and Bill, had never highlighted service-learners, but admitted they do not do much to highlight volunteers in general. Most of the community partners mentioned highlighting volunteers in general as being a weakness, but did say they tried to thank service-learners when they were on site and also had their clients thank them. Mary said the following:

> It [recognizing students] wasn't anything formal, but trying to make them [students] feel that they were doing something really meaningful, making sure that whenever possible that they actually met the [client] that they were helping and just thanking them profusely myself.

The community partners considered this informal recognition as more reasonable than formal (e.g., thank you notes, certificates, service-learner of the month awards) recognition, which would be too time consuming. All wished they had more time to spend on service-learning recognition, but felt their informal efforts were a good way to show that student investment was appreciated. Also discussed were volunteer thank you dinners and events hosted by some of the community partners; many said it was difficult to draw students who had completed their collaborations two semesters ago to the event. Faculty was often invited to these types of functions, but often did not attend. Most

community partners admitted they could do more to recognize service-learners. Dave said the following:

> …but then again it's because of the experience they [service-learners] have the first time [at our site] for whatever reason they felt appreciated, or they wouldn't come back. Anything formal, like you know, letters of thank you, anything, it becomes daunting. I'm sitting here thinking how inundating would that be for his [our volunteer coordinator] time to have to write a certificate for every—I mean literally 80 to a 100 [service-learners] a semester in just that group.

Both Dave and Mary, along with the others, stressed that they wished they could do more to recognize service-learners, and many spent time asking if I had any ideas for how to do this without adding too much work on the staff end. This side conversation occurred during several interviews as many community partners had never really thought about recognizing service-learners other than saying thank you.

Investment level was a major issue for the community partners on all ends. They were not afraid to share the accountability they had with their own investment levels, but expected the same in return from students and faculty, or at least honesty about not being invested. Also collaborations with high levels of investment seemed to showcase the common elements of clear expectations through communication from all stakeholders, and some of these even extended beyond the initial service-learning collaboration.

## Communication

Communication occurs between and among stakeholders and is necessary for expectations to be clearly discussed. Community partners pressed on expectations and investment throughout the interviews, but also stressed that communication was a major barrier to, or indicator of, success. Stakeholders have long identified communication as one of the biggest frustrations with service-learning collaborations (Reeb & Folger, 2013;

Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that it was recognized as a major theme in this study. Community partners mentioned frustrations with communication channels. For example, Mary described confusion over whether her organization should directly contact students or "funnel" things through the faculty member and trust information would be passed along to students. Several community partners mentioned a frequent lack of clarity around whether they should communicate directly with students or faculty. Community partners also mentioned communication as a frustration when it came to understanding student interest and investment in service-learning collaborations. Mountain's K–12 partner, Fred, said:

> …the people who come in excited, and they either a) want to learn or they b) – and I love these students – they want to bring something to us. So we tell our volunteers all the time, "if you have a passion, if you have something you enjoy, bring it to us."

Finally, community partners admitted they wanted more communication at the end of service-learning collaborations to better assess whether stakeholder expectations were met. Ultimately feedback, stakeholder communication, communicating expectations, networking, and internal communication were identified as subthemes under communication. Reviewing the issues with communication, many community partners addressed wanting more feedback throughout and after the process, as well as more clarity about how stakeholders communicate and who is responsible for the communication of clear expectations among stakeholders including internal staff. They also enjoyed networking opportunities with students, faculty, and other organizations.

Feedback

Feedback is a form of communication where stakeholders are able to share thoughts about their experiences with collaborations. Feedback was a major point of discussion across community partners. Several community partners mentioned not receiving formal feedback, while many said they had been asked to formally evaluate students at the end of a collaboration. Star's partner, Mary, summarized her organization's experiences with feedback:

> I think it would be helpful—feedback in both directions. Communications in general and feedback in particular that goes both ways I think would be a good opportunity to strengthen partnerships and relationships. We'd be learning more about whether we're really meeting needs and they'd [faculty] be learning more about whether they're meeting our needs with the projects. Again, I think it's just that all parties involved are so busy. We're busy, we're conscious of the time that it takes to provide whatever minimum support we're able to provide as an, up until now, all-volunteer organization, and I know the faculty are probably super overburdened with all of their various course and student demands, administrative demands, and getting grades in at the end of the semester and so on.

Formal evaluations were also discussed by community partners; some mentioned being asked to evaluate student performance in formal ways with forms, while others mentioned being asked to provide feedback more informally through emails or later in-person discussions.

College center staff also felt that feedback between the stakeholders is an area with much room for growth. Tree's college center staff member said:

> I survey every semester faculty and community partners. Student evaluation is part of student evaluations (students complete at the end of the semester to evaluate the class as a whole), so I don't have to send it to students. I send it to faculty and community partners every semester. That feedback goes into our database. We ask about satisfaction, but as sort of one question in that, but the point of the survey is not satisfaction. The point of the survey is impact. I try to collect information about how those opportunities that semester changed things for that partner or the student.

Most community partners mentioned they were willing to provide feedback, but preferred to give feedback on the process and impact more so than to grade or formally evaluate students. Half of the community partners interviewed said they had filled out formal forms to evaluate students, while all said at one point they had been asked to formally evaluate student performance. Those community partners who mentioned being invited to student presentations at the end of the semester had positive things to say about this feedback method because it allowed their organization to gain exposure to other organizations and vice versa. It should be noted that many also mentioned it was difficult to attend these presentations because they were almost always held on campus and during work hours:

> …we are running a really big show here, so I always feel bad like I'm letting them [the students] down, but I just explain to them it's hard for me to escape. I do sometimes [go], but sometimes faculty say, "Hey can you come up and meet on campus," and it's like I feel so selfish saying, "I really can't."

This statement came from Tree's K–12 partner, Annie, who noted it would be nice to have timely communication around when and where final presentations would take place. At the same time, Annie fully acknowledged understanding that students are also busy and that set class times are when they expect to give their final presentations. Mountain's seasoned partner, Eve, added the following thoughts about being asked to attend presentations and provide feedback:

> That really varies. It depends so much, often… the ones I really love because I get to personally enjoy, is when a faculty invites me into a classroom at the end of the semester. I love it when I start out being able to go in, talk about who we are, make a presentation about our organization, and then I get to go the last day when the students get to make presentations. There's been more than a handful of those—I really love that. Often that's not the case, often the semester is ending, the students are really busy, I might get an email with something the student's written attached so that I have a copy of it. …I'm not pining for it [evaluation], feeling like they're not getting the full deal but I do think it's really helpful when,

> personally it's very satisfying to sit in a room and see a Power Point presentation that a student's done that includes all the information about our organization and what they've learned. So I get to come away going "this student really understands all that we do" and that's just fun. In a way it's just vanity but it's really fun to get to see them.

Star's partner, Mary, mentioned her struggles with not being able to provide feedback for drafts throughout the semester. This was a major concern as her organization has branding and marketing standards in place that must be followed. Other community partners also mentioned how communication and feedback on projects throughout the process could alleviate simple issues. Below are Mary's thoughts:

> And then some simple things, like they didn't use our correct logo—there's some pretty strict branding things for … We can't just use any logo that we want, so yeah, like I said, at that point when we received the final product, we hadn't ever seen the final script or anything to suggest the revisions that would have been helpful and very simple.

Mary also eluded to a lack of communication around when a final product would be given to her and that she was still waiting on one from the prior semester at the time of the interview:

> It's been a couple weeks or more since the semester ended and I still haven't seen the work product. I know it's coming, and I look forward to seeing it, but still there's been no further communication about what I might see other than that email conversation [with the faculty member] asking me what I would like to see and so on, and that's not atypical.

Stakeholder Communication

Communication was an often described element in this study, and within these descriptions were references to single stakeholder communication. The college center staff discussed communication in depth for a large piece of time during the focus group. Part of this communication included preparation for collaborations, whether faculty had spent time communicating expectations, how collaborations impacted community

partners, or asking community partners to become more involved with this preparation. All but seven community partners said they particularly enjoyed attending the students' classes at least once to communicate who they are and what they do.

The college center staff described problems they had observed among stakeholders related to communication including the following concern from some community partners when it came to community partners openly communicating issues. Mountain's college center staff member said:

> We get way more feedback about poor partners than we do service-learning faculty. I think that partners don't want to burn bridges and don't want to say that professor never once called us or students showed up and had no idea what was going on. They want the longevity of the relationship, whereas faculty are so quick to say my student tried to call this organization three times and they never called them back take them off the list. Which is fine, that's why we exist is to make sure we do have organizations that will answer the phone and return calls to our students. In my time I have not seen a single nonprofit that has spoken up about a poor service-learning relationship.

Although most community partners discussed not being shy about addressing situations as they arose during service-learning collaborations, none of them mentioned ever contacting a college center to discuss these situations during collaborations. Star's seasoned partner, Dave, said his organization did work with the college center on a larger scale to discuss future trainings and that past concerns were topics for these trainings. Dave felt, however, that most of the issues with faculty were simply with them checking out and that he had learned to work around this disconnect by working directly with students.

College center staff also discussed students' willingness and ability to comprehend this communicated preparation that overviewed the expectations of the service-learning assignments and delivery to community partners. Mountain's college

center staff member said:

> It's interesting for me, I don't remember being so clueless as a student, but it's interesting to me how students will go to a community partner and they don't know what they're supposed to be doing. It's not surprising that some experiences just end up falling flat if there is not good communication between the faculty and the community partners. You get sharp students, but then you also get students who are completely, totally clueless who don't know which class they are in.

College center staff felt faculty did not always work with students to communicate expectations in a manner that was easily understandable to the possible wide range (e.g., year, major) of students they had in class. Mountain's staff member added:

> Framing what success looks like for the students is really helpful too. Just saying this is going to be a 15-hour student project isn't enough. What are we trying to accomplish in 15 hours, are we trying to finish a project, start something that's gonna carry on forever—comes back to some students won't get it ever.

College center staff also believed community partners needed to be part of the communication process in terms of expectations and impact. This included community partners developing memorandum of understanding agreements, as well as written proposals students could refer to rather than oral agreements reviewed in initial meetings with students and faculty. Tree's staff member added:

> It comes back to the community partner too. I really encourage faculty to have written agreements. It's not because I want people to sign off on it, it's because I think that having an oral agreement about expectations and having a written agreement about expectations are not always the same. If everybody reads it and understands it in a more similar way, the likelihood that students will understand the expectations and the likelihood the community partner is going to get something out of it that they wanted to get out of it go up.

Finally, communication among all stakeholders and in an on-going fashion is necessary because things could change during the project or the answers to specific questions may be necessary to clear up confusion. Star's college center staff member

said:

> I think you are absolutely right. Especially, I think a lot of community partners I work with that are a large organization, they may be the one working with the faculty, but they may not be the one working with the student. You talk about goals being convoluted and difficult for students to ascertain what they are really doing, and then that gets passed on to staff. Both sides are kind of lost. As you mentioned to the previous point, community partners want to support students and kind of cater to student needs. Things are articulated, and we wonder why you start at A and end at Z at the end of the semester.

As described above in expectations, there was often a lack of clarity regarding what was expected of each stakeholder. A common underlying theme for eight of the partners was that they set up the collaborations with the faculty, but then worked primarily with the students, although sometimes the faculty member wanted to remain involved. This created the confusion described in the responses below because some stakeholders were involved at the ground level and others more at a macro level. Star's growing partner, Mary, mentioned the following:

> So in the case where I have direct access to students, I think the communication can sometimes be better than when we're kind of trying to funnel everything through the faculty member.

Tree's partner, Annie, described a situation where stakeholders had problems communicating effectively to establish shared goals for the project:

> I did have a situation with some social work students where the professor kept nagging on them in class about "well that's not dah, dah, dah, dah," but everything they were doing was everything that I wanted from them, so I actually would follow up with her [the professor] and say "I'm really happy with how this is going."

The communication element remained a struggle on all ends, but it was evident that one of the main issues for community partners was collaborations in which expectations were not communicated. This included hour requirements, expectations of what direct and indirect services entailed for student grades, and clear goals from all

stakeholders. Some communication struggles came from the fact that not all community partners required or held an orientation for service-learners. Although not one community partner required background checks for students, several did mention they had staff on site to supervise students at all times when they were working with certain clients. Some viewed this staff member supervision as an alternative to orientation.

Communicating Expectations

When expectations and requirements were discussed ahead of time, all of the community partners expressed gratitude because they had a clearer picture of what to expect during the collaboration process. This clarity came across through the interviews as more important than the quality of the final product because community partners felt that students gained an understanding of their organization while also developing deeper knowledge around their classroom topic when strong communication occurred. The community partners also felt faculty was more invested when collaborations had clearly communicated expectations. Grace, one of the opted out partners, admitted that not only had her organization had poor experiences communicating with service-learners and faculty, but that they as an organization were not always good communicators. She noted communication as a main reason her organization was not actively involved in service-learning collaborations.

Remaining in constant communication throughout the collaboration process seemed to be a bigger concern with community partners hosting indirect collaborations because direct services were typically completed at the community partner's site. This meant community partners regularly saw students as long as they showed up to perform the service. The five community partners who employed primarily direct service

opportunities also mentioned trying to encourage communication between students and their clients. This was more prevalent among direct service providers than indirect service providers. Star's seasoned partner, Dave, made this point about the direct service component:

> …I think when it comes to the service learning unit, just like in our population, every student who comes to us has a different skill set, different personality, different communication skills, much like the kids within our own organization well, any organization. And I think when individuals come to you, the real life experience is really just being in the middle of it and it's not necessarily the overall – just the verbal communication given – but watching kids and how they develop relationships with students who come through here, so a real assertive student is going to make an impact pretty much right away.

The community partners who utilized both indirect and direct services believed that communication with students helped students gain a better sense of the bigger picture of the organization's identity related to what it does and the programs and services in place to serve its clients. This was true of Mountain's growing partner, Clyde, who mixed direct and indirect service:

> We have volunteers that come in and stuff packets. But if we can take them out and let them see what we are doing in action, then they see the big picture and are much more motivated to do the nuts and bolts stuff.

Tree's seasoned community partner, Carol, stressed that it was sometimes the clients who provided informal or formal feedback about whether the collaboration was working:

> …but also communication about what they're teaching, when they're going to be here, and all those kinds of things. As far as kind of nonsuccessful [collaborations], that was kind of the environment where we had situations that they [service-learners] didn't really take into account, like the ages of the kids, how active the kids were, what the kids were really interested in, and so one I'm thinking about in particular is our children did some gardening experiences and it was a very straightforward lesson. There wasn't a lot of hands-on things, and 10 minutes into it, our kids were bored and running around the garden picking vegetables and not paying really any attention. So, just kind of doing a lot of prep

> work, you know, the front end, is what's really helpful, and making the teachers as well a part of that process, really works well.

Building on Carol's quote, community partners said they felt most issues around content came from a lack of research on the part of the student or faculty time spent preparing the student. The most common complaint was students not understanding basic elements of nonprofit work. Another complaint from Annie was that students were not prepared to work with the population their agency represented:

> My biggest gripe if I had a complaint, would be – and this is me with everybody, not just service-learning. But you know, in general, when we view doing, being involved in communities, especially with low socioeconomical status, people view the work that they're coming into as a kind of, like savior mentality or like a deficit.

A couple of other community partners stressed they had to be forthcoming with service-learners at first because they did work with a lot of youth who were in transitional phases with parents, housing and safety. They stressed this to help the service-learners realize they could be great mentors to the youth. Finally, none of the community partners felt it was their place to change curriculum at the higher education institution, but they stressed how much growth they saw in students who did service-learning. They believed service-learning gave students a chance to be in the trenches to explore work and see if they liked it and were good at it. This was a place in which many were willing to work with students as they did not want to place them with children if they did not like children. This finding tied more to direct service, which Carol's organization primarily did:

> …and kind of how to work with at-risk kids as well. So, I think that's [direct service opportunities] a big advantage, and some of them [service-learners] decide "Ok, I don't ever want to do this" and some of them are like "love it, I want to know as much about."

Networking

Networking often occurs in settings that afford opportunities for community partners to meet possible faculty partners, student volunteers, and fellow community partners. This is done through discussions about current work being done in organizations, education about missions of organizations, and advertisement of volunteer needs. One example of networking is when community partners attend classes on campuses. Some of the community partners who participated in this study stressed that attending student classes was an opportunity to network with others on campus about their organization. They mentioned college centers as great resources to help them communicate their needs and network with additional faculty and students. Star's college center staff member added the following:

> I'm that first person that community partners should call if they have a need. Whether it's service-learning or just a basic volunteer need for a small, one time event. I meet with community partners, try to have sit down meetings and I bring a checklist when I sit down to meet and go through all of their volunteer needs and then I really kind of challenge our community partners to think outside of the box and think about what kind of projects they would like to see completed. I always use the analogy, "What's that sticky note that's been collecting dust next to your computer?" What's that project they've been kind of putting off and really push them to articulate that to me. All of their project or service-learning needs to come to me, then I put it in a Google doc and share it with our faculty partner [staff member]. At our staff meetings we work together [to determine] what community partner service-learning needs are and what faculty would be logical to reach out to.

Regular contact with community partners through email, networking events, or trainings allowed college center staff to expand their knowledge around the challenges, needs, and success stories community partners shared. It also allowed them to deepen their knowledge of community partner missions and identities to afford additional networking opportunities for community partners. Tree's college center staff member

said:

> …we have actually had new service-learning classes come out of [our events] because a faculty member came to the [event] and met a community partner who came to [the event] but they didn't end up having a match, but that person referred the community partner to a different faculty person and they made a new class of it.

All three of Star's partners currently participating in service-learning mentioned using the center as a resource, while at least two participants mentioned Mountain and Tree as resources. All partners who mentioned the centers said they believed the centers were great places to network with other community partners and faculty. Dave explained how his organization has created a network with alumni and other organizations on campus because of past relationships through the Star college center. A key finding within this theme was that the communicated networking opportunities that the community partners chose to participate in provided additional opportunities for service-learning collaborations and support if they chose to seek them out. These opportunities ranged from trainings around volunteering and service-learning to working with the millennial generation to speed dating and quick networking. Additionally, Star's three current partners touted its staff and center thoroughly during the interviews as a great resource for their community organization and for being well organized with formal agreements and guidance, on top of informal brainstorming and support. Both Mary and Dave remain involved with Star's college center through several capacities to ensure the networking opportunities continue.

Internal communication

The final element of communication was within the community partner organizations. Most of the community partners interviewed are the primary person

working with service learners. Overall only one organization has had no other staff member work with service-learners. This can pose issues as one staff member may set up service-learning collaborations, while another staff member works directly with students. This model is similar to a faculty member setting up service-learning collaborations and then having the students complete the service without participating in the initial setup. The community partners admitted that service-learning collaborations worked when the clearly communicated expectations were passed on to others in the organization who had interactions with the service-learners. Tree's opted out partner, Grace, said her organization had not done a good job of sharing information about service-learning projects of the past, as well as current projects. She admitted this was a weakness of her organization and something the organization needed to rectify before participating in additional service-learning opportunities. Tied to this, five community partners stressed that much potential for success or struggles with service-learning collaborations rested on their ability to communicate the organization's needs, goals, and time availability. Mountain's K–12 partner, Fred, mentioned the following:

> I am a poor verbal communicator. I need to write, but I know there is not one correct way for others to communicate as well. Learning what works best—the receiving information student preference for communication is important to know.

Overall, communication emerged as a major theme in the findings of this study. It was discussed several times during the interviews in general and through its subthemes of feedback, stakeholder responsibility, and internal communication. These subthemes provided a collective look at how clear communication affects expectations for goals while achieving mission support and student learning.

## Echelons of Collaborations

Varying experiences with expectations, investment, and communication were addressed as community partners thoroughly described past experiences with service-learning collaborations. These three themes contributed to the differing levels the collaborations attained. The term echelons of collaborations was selected to describe the final theme because it showcases the variation and different characteristics each service-learning collaboration possessed, as well as the range of relationships in these collaborations. Not all collaborations developed into deep relationships where full reciprocity, shared power, and common goals were achieved. Although there was fluctuation with relationships, those perceived as simple coordination between stakeholders were not viewed as less important by community partners. They were viewed instead as simple collaborations that still benefitted all stakeholders with the realization they may simply be a one-semester occurrence or could turn into something deeper with time.

One common point that came out of the discussions was that community partners greatly appreciated when students returned to them in later semesters. By this they meant students would collaborate with their organization in one class and then choose to collaborate with them again in another class with a service-learning element. This scenario, along with students who were at one time clients returning to the same organization as service-learners were mentioned as a way of deepening relationships because there was additional time to build on each other's assets. The same was true for faculty who returned to community partners for additional collaborations, as well as college centers noting that there are definitely popular community partners among

students and faculty because they are communicative, flexible, and invested in success for all stakeholders. Tree's K–12 partner, Annie, discussed:

> I've had university faculty say this to me, "we've been told we should actually try to go somewhere else," and they try it and didn't get any response and came right back to us. I think also, it's a good description of why we're a community [organization] because we have that collaborative philosophy and we recognize we can't do this alone.

Mountain's seasoned partner, Eve, echoed Annie's sentiments, discussing the benefits from students and faculty returning to work with their organization:

> The differences are…the problem is I don't even know how to characterize the difference because, like the individual I'm having in mind about this, she's actually starting her third service-learning project with us. She's super into the subject matter. I would not be surprised at all if, when she graduates, she'll come here and look for work. And I hope she does, she's clearly demonstrated that she is great. I think of her as, her ability to manage a project is really exceptional for a student. I now have three examples of that and I know that she's got a capstone project coming up and by midsummer she'll be back here doing something with us. So it's hard to compare with someone who just comes and does some gardening time and I might not have a lot of actual interaction with that student. Not to say that they're not as committed when they're in the garden working, it just is a different…because that returning service-learner clearly wants to make it known that she has a future in this.

Nine of the community partners mentioned the benefit of building on an on-going relationship with faculty, and six of these partners discussed how their invested faculty partners volunteered for their organization outside of service-learning projects. Most of this volunteering was direct service, but Tree's partner, Carol, described that referrals to other services were a key benefit she had gained while working with a faculty member:

> …But also building those relationships with the faculty members give us kind of more exposure to other things in the communities, so for example, with the (service-learners), we wanted to take our kids to other…performances in the community, and so that was our first contact of calling them and saying "Hey, you've worked with us before, and our kids what advice do you have or what resources do you have out in the community that we could continue these experiences?" So, yeah, I think that's been really, really helpful. Right, having them as a resource and being able to explore other activities in the community,

having them to be able to come back and volunteer has been huge…

Two of the three community partners with college center Star mentioned sitting on advisory boards, committees, and panels for departments and the college center. The two community partners credited this involvement with furthering relationships between faculty and the center staff. College center Tree was also mentioned for providing opportunities for community partners to become involved with the center, but was not mentioned as often related to community partners becoming involved at the department or course level. College center Mountain was credited with providing trainings and additional service opportunities beyond service-learning that community partners could be involved with.

With the exception of the two opted out participants, all of the community partner participants used the word "relationship" more than any other term to describe their service-learning collaborations. The opted out community partners used the term "projects" more. The second most common phrase among active community partners was "partner." Star's seasoned partner, Dave, discussed how he strives to remain in contact with service-learners through relationship building:

> "Hey, are you eligible for work study?" and "Are you around for summertime?"—that kind of thing [they asked students]. The personalities and the communication with the adults and the kids, that's everything. That's all we really are, we're just establishing relationships, and once we have that, then the kids listen to what we say, and so you know, it's just a constant. I mean, I've asked volunteers, when you see what their skills, their skill set is, I've asked them to come back and do particular things or certain things. We've had a couple that loved spending time out in the [site].

Mountain's K–12 partner, Fred, mentioned how much the elementary kids loved their regular volunteers, while Tree's partner, Carol, noted how often her young clientele talked about previous service-learners. Both of these agencies, along with six other

organizations mentioned service-learners who continued with their organization even after the service-learning component ended. Those who did not mention continuation of service were Tree and Star's growing partners, the two opted out partners, and Star's K–12 partner. All agencies admitted that tracking continuation of service was not always easy due to staff turnover and the number of years since the service-learning collaboration occurred, which in turn meant unfamiliarity with past service-learners. Eve noted, "It's really the students [service-learners] who make direct contact, and those students tend to be very dedicated and come back time and time again to do projects with us. So it's a different kind of a relationship." Relationships with previous service-learners ranged from volunteering to applying for a job to conducting a workshop. Annie mentioned how the impacts of service-learning are very diverse, ranging from the economic impact of human capital to the impact individual service-learners have on the children at the school they work with.

Out of the 11 community partners, it should be noted that only three did not mention any faculty member by name, nor mention a class they had collaborated with frequently. One of these was not involved at the ground level of the service-learning implementation, while the other two were involved at the ground level. One of the opted out partners mentioned a faculty member and collaborating with them, while the other did not mention anyone or any class specifically. Two community partners, one K–12 and the other an environmental nonprofit, both mentioned the same faculty member as an invested service-learning collaborator. Of the 11 community partners interviewed, seven mentioned working with more than one higher education institution involved in this study, while others mentioned additional collaborations with centers not involved in this

study. Eve explained the following around working with two institutions:

> We've definitely had some service learners continue on as volunteers but the area that's been really unbelievably impressive to me has been faculty continuing to volunteer and continuing to be involved. I've seen this especially with [Mountain's] faculty and a couple of those are also [an institution not involved in this study's] faculty so their commitment and enthusiasm is amazing. I mean they have become regular volunteers and really connected and have a great understanding of what the organization is, and that's been just amazing to me because I can't imagine how a faculty person has the time for it.

The seven community partners who had collaborated with multiple college centers had mostly positive experiences with both institutions, although some had both positive and less successful experiences with both. Their opinions about the institutions seemed to be tied more to experiences they had with individual faculty rather than the college centers. Eve described the differences with the three institutions she had worked with, noting one included more involvement with students, another with the faculty and the final with the college service center. Eve added:

> Usually the [Mountain] center will make a meeting between myself and a faculty, and then I'll work directly with the faculty person. Then I'll work directly with the students, but it usually lives more around the faculty. [Tree's] students tend to be—I haven't had a lot of direct contact with the [Tree's] center except for their involvement at those shared center-based events. Other than that there's been almost no contact except for when I need to post internships, things like that.

Three college centers that were not part of this study were also mentioned as collaborators with the community partners interviewed. The same attributes that led to success in the study's collaborations were mentioned in relation to these other centers: strong communication, investment from all stakeholders, and clear doable expectations. Tree's growing partner, Bill, discussed his recent collaboration with an outside college center and how his organization was working with this center to set clear expectations and realistic projects through communication of goals and delivery dates. Tree's opted

out partner, Grace, noted her best service-learning projects had come from two additional institutions that were not part of this study because the faculty member was invested and sat down with staff to lay out a plan with clear goals for students.

Reflecting on the investment finding, community partners easily articulated how service-learning supported the mission of their organizations. They also articulated the belief that many service-learners did not fully understand their community organization's mission, but were able to understand what their community organization does. "Service-learners support our mission through the fundamentals," said Clyde. Service-learners contributed to community partners by helping them do what they do through capacity, brainstorming, and production in both direct and indirect ways. None of the community partners described the collaborations as having their own identity, and the word partnership was not often used to explain deeper-level relationships. The community partners described deeper relationships with faculty members or students. During these descriptions, they did not describe these relationships as separate identities where the collaborations themselves had achieved collective core commitments to the collaboration separate from the larger organization. Rather, the collaborations included relationships that helped each organization achieve its own mission while supporting its identity.

## Findings Conclusion

In Chapter 4, I discussed the findings from the data that were collected and analyzed. Data included document review, a focus group, interviews, and analysis and also included journals I maintained throughout the data collection process. Four major themes arose from the data. The themes, *expectations, investment,* and *communication* further developed a clearer picture of the final theme *echelons of collaboration.* The

themes intertwined throughout the study while also possessing unique characteristics. Echelons of collaboration presented a way to describe the varying levels of relationships that came from each service-learning collaboration mentioned by community partners. These relationships were built from additional information provided by the college center staff as they observed how relationships develop among stakeholders. The themes of this study carry into Chapter 5, where I discuss them in reference to existing service-learning literature and studies as well as their implications for policy, practice, and research.

Table 4.1: Participant descriptions.

| College Center | Seasoned CP | Growing CP | Opted out CP | K–12 CP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mountain | Environment | Environment | Health | Education |
| | Volunteer Coordinator | Volunteer Coordinator | Volunteer Coordinator | Volunteer Coordinator |
| | Eve | Clyde | George | Fred |
| | | | | |
| Star | Children's Services | Human Services | N/A | Education |
| | Executive Director | Board Member | N/A | Volunteer Coordinator |
| | Dave | Mary | N/A | Jackie |
| | | | | |
| Tree | Health | Government | Children's Services | Education |
| | Volunteer Coordinator | Executive Director | Chief Operating Officer | Volunteer Coordinator |
| | Carol | Bill | Grace | Annie |

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapter 4, I described how being flexible and willing to accept a variety of levels of reciprocity created expectations for community partners that could often be met or come close to being met. Understanding how community partners developed these expectations formed a key foundation for the levels of investment they gave to collaborations, how they communicated within these collaborations, and what drove their level of collaboration. Staff from college centers from three higher education institutions offered a road map to what they have observed between stakeholders involved in service-learning collaborations. Community partners explained the potholes, stop signs, and green lights that arose along these routes. The routes taken by the community partners produced a variety of examples that illustrated their experiences with service-learning, which can guide the construction of future collaborations.

In Chapter 5, I summarize this study's findings, return to the literature to compare the results of this study, and discuss potential implications for practice, policy, and research. The following portion of this chapter summarizes the themes that emerged from the data: expectations, investment, communication, and echelons of collaboration. Intertwining with this summary is an exploration of how the findings from this study support and dispute other researchers' findings. Finally, this chapter examines the implications of this study's findings for the field in regards to best practices and future

research.

## Organizational Identity

Researchers have examined how community partners perceive service-learning, and the literature around community partners and service-learning continues to grow. Janke (2009) explored organizational identity in her study and found that community partners had varying opinions of their service-learning collaborations related to whether they described collaborations as relationships or possessing characteristics of separate identities built from deep reciprocal relationships. The community partners interviewed in this study fell in line with Janke's findings in that most viewed service-learning collaborations as relationships. However, there was some discrepancy in the level of the relationships for this study's participants.

Many of this study's community partners described service-learning as a relationship that afforded them opportunities to meet organizational demands. They saw these relationships as reciprocal in nature because their organization gained capacity while students were afforded the opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge in a practical setting. Community partners described how student capacity assisted their organizations with fulfilling the deepest commitments central to the organization's identity and mission (Whetten, 2006). Service-learning provided a mode for performing services and developing products (Albert & Whetten, 1985) in a manner that supports identity and mission rather than forcing the organization to stray from these if they were primarily concerned about student learning. Community partners in this study found that students supported what the organization did, as in organizational identity, even if they did not have a full understanding of the organization's mission. This finding

demonstrated that students can support organizational commitments without fully understanding organizational missions.

Community partners developed flexibility in support services and investment in order to develop expectations that realistically met the needs of all stakeholders. Community partners also noted that when they invested in service-learning collaborations, the return on investment included something positive for the organization. This positive element ranged from an outstanding brochure to mentoring services for youth to having service-learners share their organization's work with other college students, which in turn led to future service-learner capacity. Young (2001) described identity as holistic in nature, but with characteristics that are distinct in ways organizations integrate, support, and drive operations. Service-learners are one part of a holistic identity that allows an organization to sustain systems that boost the commitments they have subscribed to over time through practices that also support their mission. These commitments to organizational identity remain the same for the organization despite turnover of students, community partner staff, and faculty, or in other words rotating stakeholder investment. Strong organizational identity proved a key factor in allowing flexibility in service-learning collaborations that provided support to core commitments while not straying from organizational mission.

## Joint Efforts

Community partners did not seem as concerned with semantics as researchers who have longed for better descriptions of service-learning (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009; Jacoby, 1996; Sigmon, 1994). Community partners used the word "partnerships" much less throughout the interviews, while "relationship" emerged as the descriptor of

choice. As described in Chapter 2, theorists have argued over terminology when labeling service-learning collaborations. Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison (2010) discussed partnership as a deeper term that is often thrown around lightly, while Hopkins (2011) believed collaboration and partnership are interchangeable terms. Beere (2009) and Strand et al. (2003) focused their work on characteristics of collaborations rather than labels. This study's findings, as described in Chapter 4, supported characteristic assignment more than labeling.

Winer and Ray (1994) described two crucial characteristics of successful joint efforts: "everyone must agree on the level of intensity and the level of intensity must be appropriate to the desired results" (p. 23). These two elements complement this study's emergent themes of expectations and investment. A key finding within joint efforts was that community partners did not subscribe to a single, concrete definition of reciprocity. Rather, community partners were flexible with their expectations for collaborations, and communicated these expectations as they worked to develop investment levels. As described in Chapter 4, community partners believed they gained from collaborations what they invested in them. When expectations were realistic and communicated, the return on investment for all stakeholders was typically what was desired. When communication did not occur, or expectations were not achievable and investment lacking, the return was typically less than desired.

When asked in the interviews, community partners engaged in current collaborations could not think of examples of disastrous collaborations because they commonly believed that each collaboration resulted in something positive. This fell in line with Winer and Ray's (1994) work exploring risk and return involved with joint

efforts and with Jacoby's (1996) work that noted service-learning requires little risk. There seemed to be little risk involved with service-learning; community partners who continued collaborations perceived gaining something positive from each collaboration despite the fact that the level of positive results varied. Organizational identity served as a guiding resource as I explored how the findings related to the literature around joint efforts. Although several common characteristics were mentioned by stakeholders throughout the interviews, commitment to identity explained how relationship dynamics could differ from collaboration to collaboration while still allowing for the attainment of commitments. Goals of sustaining what the organization did seemed to trump relationships where conflicting personalities and varying investment levels existed.

Sandy and Holland (2006) mentioned that there are several differences among community partners in terms of their organizational structure. The findings from this study supported this. Differences among organization staff size, mission, and identity were described in Chapter 3. Another difference was the past experiences of community partner staff, who participated in this study. Some had more or less experience with service-learning than their organization. An example was Fred, who had participated in service-learning as a student, instructor, and community partner before moving into his new K–12 position. On the other hand, Dave had only experienced service-learning at his current agency.

Although community partners varied related to the formal and informal organizational support structures described in Chapter 4, they did not waver in their commitments to fulfill the organizational missions. This was true of the opted out group as well. Both opted out partners had participated in service-learning as students, but were

not currently participating with it in their community partner organizations. Both of these participants mentioned various reasons for no longer participating in service-learning with the common issue of not having projects that both fit student need and fulfilled their organization's mission.

## Systems Influence

All of the community partners interviewed in this study mentioned struggling with fulfilling core commitments. These struggles were mentioned in Chapter 4 related to capacity, idea generation, and volunteer hours. Systems influence is another literature frame that examines a holistic system such as organizational identity related to the components that make an organization function (Young, 2001c). Community partners in this study were not unique in that external and internal factors influenced their organizational identity (Katz & Kahn, 1966). As described in Chapter 4, policies such as the Affordable Care Act and funding concerns around grants were driving forces for incorporating practices including service-learning to fill gaps in inputs.

Not only were participants in this study influenced by the external and internal systems driving their organizations, they also were faced with behaviors of service-learners coming into their organizations. Chapter 4 described the idea that community partners were willing to be flexible if students were forthcoming about the investment levels they could give to the projects or direct service. When students were distracted by class assignments, other classes, or additional time commitments, their investment to service-learning waned. These outside behaviors influenced the inputs organizations had in place to help them achieve their commitments, but flexibility and communicated expectations allowed the system to "furnish signals to the structure about the environment

and its own functioning in relation to the environment" (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 193). Therefore, creating feedback loops between stakeholders offered an opportunity for community partners to examine their external inputs, what comes from these inputs, and how they develop into outputs (Skyttner, 2001). This allowed community partners to adjust and move beyond concerns about the short-term nature of service-learning collaborations and scheduling needs (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999). Moving beyond these concerns showcases a manner in which feedback was used to correct negative inputs that were influencing external outputs, or in this case what were long considered burdens becoming simple barriers to think around. Bill provided an example of this during interviews when he stated his organization was willing to work with projects during classes that are intensive in duration or shorter in semester-length as long as expectations were clear and investment from all stakeholders was in place.

## Stakeholders

Chapter 2 explored stakeholders in regards to those involved in service-learning collaborations and whether stakeholder reflection occurs. Much of the founding literature described service-learning as involving students, faculty, and community partners (Cress, 2005; Eyler, & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2003). Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison (2010) expanded on these stakeholder groups and developed their framework "SOFAR," which includes students, organizations, faculty, administrators, and community residents. Chapter 4 noted examples where all stakeholders identified in the SOFAR model were mentioned, although terminology may have varied. An example of this variation was reference to kids or clients rather than residents. University administrators were most

often referenced in the form of the college centers or academic department administration rather than campus-wide administrators such as vice presidents or the president. This hierarchical mention could also be applied to community partners where some boards and presidents knew about service-learning collaborations, while others may not; staff overseeing volunteer departments or elements of these departments were most often aware of collaborations.

The possible large number of stakeholders also produced barriers for feedback in collaborations. As noted in Chapter 4, community partners were sometimes asked to formally reflect on student performance through evaluations, but often did not receive any feedback. Community partners expressed a desire to further reflect on service-learning collaborations with all stakeholders, including clients and administrators, but were realistic about the barriers and unsure of how to leap these barriers.

## Stakeholder Variances

Chapter 2 surveyed literature that explored the lack of clarity around K–12 schools and nonprofit organizations. As illustrated in Chapter 4, community partners did not describe the lack of understanding (e.g., policies, organizational structure, mission, and capacity barriers; Bell & Carlson, 2009) around nonprofits and K–12 organizations as a prevalent barrier to successful collaborations. None of the community partners interviewed required background checks of students, and most believed they offer necessary training to students; both had been mentioned as present issues due to service-learning being short term (Martin, SeBlonka, & Tryon, 2009). The more prevalent issues with positive outcomes were clearly communicated expectations that involved investment by all stakeholders.

Additionally, there were points mentioned by community partners that outlined differences among K–12, nonprofit, and government partners. Jackie described limitations for what service-learners could teach in K–12 public schools through the example of a religious studies course. The same scenario would likely be true in a government setting due to separation of church and state policies, whereas nonprofits have more flexibility with curriculum offerings that support their mission. Sandy and Holland (2006) found that K–12 schools "tended to underscore the importance of written agreements and structure more frequently than community-based organization partners" (p. 34), which was somewhat true in this study's findings. Written agreements were not required, but structure with scheduling of service hours was pinpointed by K–12 participants as a limitation and supported the subtheme of constraints on flexibility under direct service opportunities. Although K–12 schools follow set schedules, other nonprofits do as well, which limits flexibility for direct service opportunities.

## Community Partner Motivations

Motivations for community partners to participate in service-learning collaborations were explored in Chapter 2, including a comparison of past studies around community partners (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999). These studies found that there is no one-size fits all approach to service-learning; the findings outlined in Chapter 4 support this idea related to why community partners are motivated to collaborate. Community partners had similar reasons for collaborating, as noted in Chapter 4, and they had differing reasons for collaborating. The similarities across their responses were not surprising given that the community partners are focused on their

missions and fulfilling their organizational commitments. The differences also were not surprising because organizations vary in regard to the clients they serve, their budget and staff sizes, and their philosophies about working with volunteers. Because no community partner's organization looks exactly like another's, it is unlikely there will ever be one clear motivation for community partners' work with service-learners. This falls in line with Sowa's (2009) belief that there could be a multitude of reasons why an organization would collaborate.

As described in Chapter 4, six community partners mentioned service-learning as an avenue to earn additional funding. Service-learning as a collaboration involves more than one organization (e.g., community partner, higher education institution) for which Sowa (2009) and Hopkins (2011) believed multiple partners could strengthen funding requests. Although funding opportunities were believed to be strengthened or afforded through service-learning, it was not a main motivator for community partners to participate in service-learning collaborations.

Bell and Carlson (2009) found four thematic areas for community partner motivations to collaborate with service-learners, including altruism to education students, long-term commitment to help produce more community oriented graduates, increased human capacity, and deeper relationships with higher education campuses. These four themes were supported in the findings described in Chapter 4. Bell and Carlson also noted that the community partners having their own experiential learning experience when they were college students was a motivation for participating with service-learning. Chapter 4 outlined support of this past finding as well as disagreement, as it appeared a student service-learning experience did not outweigh staff priority for meeting

organizational mission and volunteer needs. This disagreement did not preclude a desire by community partners for all college students to be exposed to philanthropy and experiential learning with other organizations that had opportunities that fit stakeholder needs.

## Social Change

Social change was discussed specifically by two of the K–12 partners as well as seasoned partners Dave and Carol. Annie described the frustration with some students having a "savior" complex, which Henry (2005) described as students and faculty viewing themselves as the privileged serving the underprivileged. None of the community partners described bringing service-learners to create social change as the main reason for collaborating. Rather, those who did mention social change or social justice fell in line with Johnson and Chope's (2007) philosophy that service-learning provided an opportunity for students to gain exposure to social justice at a personal level rather than abstractly in the classroom. Others loosely described social change when explaining how service-learning collaborations supported their organizational mission and afforded opportunities to create partnerships that met local needs (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). All of the organizations were involved in some form of social change through their mission, identity, or clientele demographics.

## Limitations

Several examples and explanations provided by participants contributed to the findings of this study. Although the findings will contribute to a growing field of literature, as well as to practice and policy regarding service-learning, there are

limitations to this study. This study was designed with a three-part data collection process. The document review did not prove very fruitful in the data it yielded. I expanded beyond community partner websites to see if there was any mention of service-learners' work in annual reports and other published written documentation. What the document review did yield was that recognizing service-learners in a formal manner was not a priority for community partners. This finding built on exploration around whether volunteers and service-learners are seen in the same light by community partners.

Another limitation of the study is small sample size and that community partners elected not to add additional insights later in the study when invited. The community partners provided thoughtful insight during their interviews, but the data collection may have been deepened if additional thoughts had been expressed through member-checking. Finally, one thing I will consider for future studies is the collective brainstorming that occurred among community engaged center staff during the focus group for this study. This element was missed in the individual community partner interviews, although the individual interviews did allow for deeper conversation that provided individual perceptions and experiences from the partner participants. The challenge was scheduling interview times with community partners that accommodated their individual schedules.

Although this study has limitations, it builds on a developing literature related to community partners and service-learning. It provides themes related to community partner perceptions and includes a variety of viewpoints from varying community organizations (e.g., mission, staff or volunteer run, and budget) and college center staff (e.g., community college, teaching institution and research institution). These multiple stakeholder perceptions provide insight for future implications to further develop

sustainable service-learning practices.

## Implications for Policy

Higher education institutions vary in their policies around student learning and activities. Service-learning is not immune from this variation; the three institutions involved in this study utilize unique structures to support and implement service-learning. This study supported past service-learning studies that identified communication as a major barrier for stakeholders in service-learning collaborations (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999). This study also identified community partners' desire for increased flexibility with service-learning collaborations rather than following strict policies despite differing levels of stakeholder investment. Flexibility allows for alterations in expectations, communication, and engagement during collaborations.

Although flexibility is not a clearly outlined procedure or policy, higher education institutions should work with community partners to develop guidelines that allow for flexibility without jeopardizing commitments to the core missions of each organization. Each stakeholder could spend additional time communicating organizational goals and expectations around service-learning collaborations to find a common ground where flexibility could occur while student-learning quality and reciprocity among stakeholders is not jeopardized. College centers are one place for discussions to occur as college center staff expressed support for providing opportunities for communication around collaboration struggles and successes. These discussions could also provide a reflection opportunity where stakeholders discuss how flexibility has allowed them to provide more quality and reciprocal opportunities.

For example, this study identified that past study findings about the negative impact of the duration of service-learning collaborations (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999) was not a major concern as community partners have developed new or modified projects or services that fit within semester and other time restraints. These modified or new projects achieved organizational goals for community partners while also considering student learning outcomes. Finally, this study shared information about the importance of recognizing the varying engagement levels of students. Higher education institutions could utilize this information to revisit whether service-learning should be required in classes, and if so, whether students should be required to self-identify their investment level in the service-learning collaboration they are going to undertake. Requiring service-learning could increase students' investment levels because it would likely become more recognized on campuses if it were required. Requiring self-identification could also allow for flexibility because realistic expectations could be set from the beginning for all stakeholder input. During a past study I worked on, one community partner mentioned a faculty member having students state the level of involvement they were willing to give to the community project the first night of class. The community partner believed when both she and the faculty member know from the beginning the level of students' involvement both could be flexible in the opportunities they provided and expectations they had of the students. By doing this, they were able to develop projects and additional requirements that maintained learning with service.

## Implications for Practice

Service-learning collaborations require commitments from multiple stakeholders with multiple goals. This study highlighted ideas for further developing current practices while supporting organizational missions and identities. Community partners interviewed for this study clearly communicated how service-learning collaborations directly or indirectly supported their organization's mission. Community partner participants also explained how service-learning reinforced their organizational identity through support for achieving practices central to the organization's core commitments; in other words, how service-learning helped organizations do what they do. Community partners viewed service-learners as consultants when indirect service opportunities existed and as volunteers when direct service opportunities occurred.

The perceptions mentioned above provide foundations for further discussions between higher education administrators and faculty and community partners related to whether service-learning should possess recognizable characteristics that set it apart from internships, practicums, or volunteerism. Further communication should take place about whether the commitment levels of service-learners deviate from interns, practicum students, and volunteers. This could also allow for further discussion around curriculum attached to service-learning to provide experiential education opportunities while also meeting community partner needs. Bill mentioned in the findings that he observed students investing in service-learning projects more when it was the main focus of their course, and they did not have several additional assignments to complete. Very often interns and practicum students are focused on the practical application and do not likely balance several assignments and regular class reading loads like service-learners.

Volunteers also do not balance reading loads and class assignments. Future studies could explore whether the investment levels of service-learners increases as assignment requirements decrease.

Finally, this study explored feedback loops between community partners and higher education. Community partners were willing to provide feedback related to professionalism and understanding of the students if asked. Community partners also wanted students to gain more understanding of nonprofits and community work. Feedback between community partners and higher education stakeholders could build an advanced feedback loop where nonprofit career opportunities and student professional development could be further examined. This could be done at college center workshops and events, as well as at local nonprofit and community conferences.

## Implications for Research

Research directed at community partners' perception of and motivations for service-learning continues to grow. With this growth comes the opportunity to further explore relationships between stakeholders involved in service-learning collaborations. This study provides information about community partners' perceptions of the levels of investment, communication, and relationships that service-learning collaborations entail. The findings from this research provide a starting point for further exploring the levels of echelons developed among stakeholders involved in service-learning collaborations and which characteristics are present when deeper reciprocity is achieved over transactional collaborations. The depth of research around student learning, faculty involvement, and administrative practices in service-learning complements the growing field dedicated to community partners. This increasing research related to community partner viewpoints

affords an opportunity to further explore how each stakeholder individually views a single collaboration. Looking at individual perceptions of a single collaboration could also add to the understanding of which characteristics are present in deeper reciprocal collaborations.

These individual perceptions of service-learning could be collected through surveys at the conclusion of collaborations. Collecting individual stakeholder experiences could build a large, longitudinal data set, which could be used to examine trends that show evolution of service-learning collaborations, where the collaborations are now, and where stakeholders want them to be in regard to best practices for student learning, faculty teaching and research, and community partner engagement. This would support the required flexibility major changes occurred with curriculum or community partner mission.

The feedback loop could also include focus groups that provide qualitative data collection for more in depth exploration. Focus group participant selection could be explored; sometimes it might work best to have community partners, students, and faculty meet together to stimulate conversation, while at other times it may make sense to invite only community partners, students, or faculty to participate in separate focus group.

## Best Practices

This research study provided awareness around community partners' experiences with service-learning collaborations, and the practices community partners and college service center staff believe increase the success of these collaborations. This section provides a guide for these practices based on the interviews from this study and literature.

It should be noted that this guide is general in nature, as each stakeholder may possess unique challenges that need to be individually addressed.

## Understanding What Service-Learning Is

Service-learning is a form of experiential learning in which students are able to apply the knowledge they are building through assigned readings, lectures, guest speakers, and assignments in a practical setting with a community partner. Involvement in a service-learning collaboration without understanding what service-learning is can hinder the experience for all. Service-learning is different from internships and volunteering in that it includes a required academic component and encourages reflection. Understanding service-learning's unique characteristics is important. Many higher education service-learning centers provide training about service-learning as well as reading material that explains service-learning components such as reciprocity. Additionally, the national organization Campus Compact (which also has state offices) provides information about service-learning on its website.

## Establishing Expectations

Developing clear, doable, and communicated expectations is foundational for successful service-learning collaborations. Clearly outlined expectations that describe what is expected, by whom and by when, are necessary. These three elements allow for stakeholder accountability, as well as stakeholder investment during the timeframe of the collaboration. Expectations do not necessarily need to be large scale. Rather, they should include attainable outcomes that can be achieved in the agreed-upon timeframe.

Service-learning most commonly takes place during an academic semester (or

possibly quarter) timeframe. Although term length may very, it establishes clear boundaries around when students are involved with a class. Therefore, community partners and faculty must think through what can reasonably be accomplished in this timeframe and ensure that students have the availability to complete the desired outcomes. Discussing the availability and desired investment of all stakeholders should lead to fewer surprises along the way when tasks or direct service hours are not completed. Flexibility is needed to accommodate any emergency situations.

The most effective way to communicate with stakeholders involved in the collaboration is to repeat the information through multiple mediums. This could include written agreements or outlines of expectations for all stakeholders. Second, communication could include verbal discussions between stakeholders. Finally, communication could include visual aids (e.g., logic model, timeline) that quickly outline desired outcomes, timelines, and responsibilities of each stakeholder. Additionally, course syllabi should be shared with community partners to provide additional communication around the course and student learning outcomes.

### Communicating Throughout the Collaboration

Communication is a main element of collaborations because in all collaborations more than one person is involved. Communication should be a fluid process occurring throughout collaborations. Communicating clear expectations from the beginning of the collaboration will provide clarity around roles, timelines, and desired outcomes. Communicating during collaborations allows for brainstorming, feedback, and flexibility if changes need to take place. Communication at the end of collaborations provides opportunities for additional feedback. Communicating feedback appears to be the weak

link in many service-learning collaborations as faculty and students move to new semesters and courses, and community partners move to new projects and needs. Without communicated feedback, it is difficult to correct negative aspects of collaborations.

Communication after collaborations end affords reflection opportunities for growth among stakeholders. For example, community partners can reflect on whether the experience they provided was useful for student learning, as well as a good return on investment for the time committed by staff. Faculty can reflect on whether service-learning was a useful pedagogy for their class and whether they would work with this community partner(s) again. Students can reflect on what they learned from their collaborations and how they benefitted from putting classwork into practice. Students can also reflect on the benefits community partners received from their work.

## Stakeholder Responsibilities

Developing and communicating expectations and communicating throughout the process are responsibilities for all collaboration stakeholders. However, there are individual responsibilities that evolve beyond these shared ones. For example, faculty should work with other faculty and college service centers to explore effective ways of incorporating service-learning in their class(es). This allows for the development of reasonable projects in which students can balance additional coursework with service-learning expectations.

Students should be forthcoming about their availability to complete service-learning collaborations. For example, if students have large class-credit loads and work full-time, a service-learning project that requires high service hours or one that requires

more hours during finals may not work. Conflicts with meeting expected learning outcomes with student availability can arise, because the majority of service-learning takes place outside of set class hours. This means possible scheduling conflicts with other courses, work, and additional commitments. Finding a balance between what students can realistically invest and what faculty and community partners expect is important.

Community partners should examine their organization to identify current needs and the priority order of fulfilling those needs. For example, if a community partner needs assistance with a new program centered on creating community gardens, the community partner should decide if they want to focus on this need versus accepting service-learners who want to create a garden cookbook. Community partners should explore whether the fit is good for service-learning collaborations, and whether the timing works, because community partners also have busy times. Community partners should be forthcoming about their investment in service-learning collaborations because students may not be able to independently complete projects without assistance in learning about the organization and/or receiving guidance about specific projects.

College centers can assist service-learning collaborations by first encouraging all stakeholders to learn what service-learning is and its characteristics. This can be accomplished through service-learning 101 workshops, online trainings, and other forms of informational trainings. College centers can also facilitate service-learning collaborations through partner matching. For this to occur, college centers must have a pulse on which faculty are incorporating service-learning in their class(es) and the content of these course(s). This context can then be shared with community partners who

discuss needs that fit with course content. The same is true for community partners who can further advance college center staff knowledge of available partners. College centers should provide networking events to afford all stakeholders opportunities to share past collaboration designs, as well as trainings around university/college service-learning requirements.

### Flexibility

Finally, all stakeholders should enter the collaborations knowing some flexibility is necessary. There will likely be interruptions to original plans for collaboration. Willingness to be flexible from all stakeholders allows for opportunities to communicate concerns and challenges in a manner that facilitates collaborative problem solving.

## Conclusion

Reflection was a constant process throughout this study and a main reason why I wanted to complete this study. My experiences with service-learning extend over time and include various roles. This study allowed me the opportunity to further explore these roles and revisit the assumptions and opinions I have around service-learning. While my own individual reflection was a key driver for this study, a more important reason for conducting the research was to explore how others experience service-learning. Although there are limitations to this study, it contributes to a growing field of literature around collective experiences of service-learning. This collective knowledge will allow both researchers and practitioners to build practices, policies, and research studies that develop and sustain service-learning collaborations that benefit all stakeholders.

This study allowed for discussion between participants and myself within a

constructivist paradigm that included sharing knowledge and experiences. In the end, this study allowed me to revisit all of the roles I have experienced while also allowing me to delve into data collection and analysis. The themes that emerged from this study offer insight into why some collaborations thrive while others offer simple benefits. This study's findings should also transfer to future studies exploring service-learning collaborations. Community partners are recognized as a vital piece of the service-learning puzzle and will continue to remain at the forefront as studies such as mine that increase knowledge around community partner voice and successful collaborations.

# EPILOGUE

I chose this research topic based on a long history of involvement with service-learning. I valued and continue to value my service-learning experiences as a student, community partner, and instructor. When I first started exploring service-learning, I noticed a clear lack of literature about community partner experiences with service-learning. In many ways, I believe my timing was somewhat lucky because I watched a literature base evolve over time with new community partner studies coming to fruition. These additional studies have advanced the community partner literature, but room for growth remains.

I realized early on that my ability to identify gaps in the community partner literature stemmed from my readings of other service-learning literature about student learning, faculty, and the history of experiential learning. It was because these fields of literature were growing and deepening that I noticed the community partner literature was not keeping pace.

Service-learning involves two major elements: service and learning. The community partner perspective helps steer the development of guidelines for best or suggested practices for those involved in service-learning collaborations. To reach this goal, however, research must continue to evolve. The field needs research that focuses on students, faculty, and community partners, as well as additional stakeholders such as clients.

The interviews involved with this study provided me, "the practitioner," an opportunity to further explore best and worst practices in service-learning collaborations from the community partner perspective. The study provided me, "the researcher," deeper insight into past studies and theories around service-learning and how service-learning collaborations have evolved over time. The merger of my research and practice seems fitting in many ways, given that this is also main goal of service-learning. I also find it fitting to end this study by reflecting on my own experiences during my research since this is another main tenet of service-learning.

I consider myself to be well versed in service-learning, based on my exposure to it through various roles. Although I do have confidence in my own experiences, I realize service-learning collaborations involve more than one person. This study's research design provided me with a chance to converse with community partners and college center staff. Conducting the interviews for this study greatly advanced my understanding of the struggles and successes experienced by participants in service-learning collaborations. I readily admit that sitting back and listening to others' experiences was fruitful. I benefitted from reflecting on the differences and similarities between my own experiences with service-learning and others' experiences. This reflection allowed me to critically examine where I felt I had overstepped my role or not listened enough, as well as when I believed I was an engaged and invested partner in previous collaborations.

This leads me to the ultimate take away from this study: we are always learning from each other's experiences, and learning can only happen if we communicate our experiences with others. I found this take away to be true as I delved into past studies about service-learning, as well as through the interviews for this study. Community

partners are likely not exposed to, or reading, academic research about service-learning, student learning, pedagogy, or faculty retention and promotion pressures. At the same time, not all academics have worked outside of the academy or fully understand community partners' experience. I believe this is an area where college service centers can fill gaps. Even if college service centers attempt to fill knowledge and feedback gaps with workshops and trainings, they are only useful if students, faculty, and community partners attend. Scheduling conflicts for stakeholders and stakeholder prioritization of service-learning trainings are still barriers for this type of workshop planning. While I do believe some campuses have achieved great success through developing processes to bring stakeholders together, I also believe most campuses are still striving for success with this. I do know that it is through this sharing that we grow and work together to develop sustainable policies, practices, and research that help us further evolve in service-learning.

As a result of conducting this study, I reexamined my own service-learning course syllabus to determine whether service-learning should be required and how to help students and community partners develop a mutually beneficial collaboration. I also considered possible avenues to help those in the academy better understand and see community partners as assets. Many community partners are experts in their own fields who are actively engaged in developing new programs and policies. However, their work likely looks different in the practitioner realm than in the research realm that is academia. Both of these worlds are necessary because research must be put into practice, and practice must be researched to determine trends and develop new practices as community partners and higher education institutions evolve.

The idea of collaboration seems somewhat overwhelming given that most of us are so busy trying to keep up with our daily lives; why ask anyone to engage with additional stakeholders and then communicate and share feedback with those stakeholders? The reality is that we grow from reflecting and sharing. Reflecting on what was learned and then sharing what was gained from this learning is the root of what we learn in Kindergarten that drives our growth as individuals and collective groups. Reflection can occur at a surface level, but my growth happened when I critically reflected in my journal during my research. I was able to revisit past service-learning collaborations and think through how I used my own power and knowledge to improve, as well as deter collaborations. This study helped me understand that reflection and the sharing of feedback are vital components of collaborations. I also learned that we will not progress with collaborations unless we value other's experiences and learn from these experiences. In many ways the spirit of service-learning was evident throughout this study as I observed community partners learning from, reflecting about, and growing from past service-learning experiences.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT COVER LETTER

*Understanding community partner perceptions, motivations and shaping of service-learning*

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this research study is gain a deeper understanding of why community partners are motivated to participate in service-learning collaborations, as well as how they perceive and wish to shape these collaborations. I am doing this study to explore community partner's opinions of service-learning and to add to a growing field of service-learning literature centered around community partner voice.

I am asking for your assistance with this study by participating in a focus group. The focus group will be with myself and additional higher education service-learning professionals, and will include questions about your experiences while working with community partners. The focus group should last around 60 minutes, but this is negotiable based on your availability. The focus group will be recorded using a digital audio recorder, and I will take notes during the focus group.

The digital recordings and notes will be stored on my password protected laptop and at no time will your individual name nor your organization's name be mentioned in the study manuscript. Rather, all service-learning professionals will be referred to collectively and not singly identified in the manuscript.

If you have any questions or complaints, or if you feel you have been harmed by this research, please contact Amy Bergerson, University of Utah Education Leadership and Policy Department, amy.bergerson@utah.edu

Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to take part. You can choose

to leave the focus group at any time.

By agreeing to the focus group date and time, you are giving your consent to participate.

Thank you for your assistance with this study. I realize you are very busy and appreciate the time you are allotting for this focus group. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Melissa Yack Hall
melissa.hall@mpa.utah.edu

APPENDIX B

CONSENT COVER LETTER

*Understanding community partner perceptions, motivations and shaping of service-learning*

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this research study is gain a deeper understanding of why community partners are motivated to participate, continue participating and/or quit participating in service-learning collaborations, as well as how they perceive and wish to shape these collaborations. I am doing this study to explore community partner's opinions of service-learning and to add to a growing field of service-learning literature centered on community partner voice.

I am asking for your participation in this study through completing an interview. The interview will be between yourself and me, and will include questions about past and current service-learning collaborations you are/were involved with. The interview should last between 45-75 minutes, but this is negotiable based on your availability. The interview will be recorded using two digital audio recorders, and I will take notes during the interview.

The digital recordings and notes will be stored on my password protected laptop and at no time will your individual name nor your organization's name be mentioned in the study manuscript. Rather, organizations will only be identified by organizational characteristics such as mission focus (e.g., arts, education, health), and budget and staff size.

If you have any questions complaints or if you feel you have been harmed by this research please contact Amy Bergerson, University of Utah Education Leadership and Policy Department, amy.bergerson@utah.edu

Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu. Participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to take part. You can choose

to leave the interview at any time.

By agreeing to an interview date and time, you are giving your consent to participate.

Thank you for your assistance with this study. I realize you are very busy and appreciate the time you are allotting for this interview. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Melissa Yack Hall

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